All the News Without Fear or Favor

The CAMBODIA DAILY

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Torture Panel Calls Out Gov't On 'Impunity'

By Zsombor Peter and Kuch Naren
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The UN Committee Against Torture urged Cambodia to define precisely what torture means in its domestic laws and set up an independent body to investigate alleged cases in a list of recommendations released yesterday.

It also asked the government to explain the deaths of three Cambodians in police custody over the past two years and follow up on the fate of 20 Uighur asylum seekers the government sent back to China last year, drawing international condemnation.

The recommendations and requests come from a new report on Cambodia's appearance before the committee two weeks ago in Geneva, only its second since acceding to the UN Convention Against Torture in 1992. The hearing was a chance to gauge Cambodia's progress in meeting its obligations.

After Cambodia's first showing in 2003, the committee, a panel of 10 independent experts, pressed the government to step up its efforts to stop the use of confessions gained by torture in court.

However, human rights groups say the use of forced confessions remains common practice. Licadho claims at least 118 Cambodians were tortured by authorities in 2009, most of them while in police custody. Despite some welcome gains, including the approval of several new treaties and laws, the 15-page report often agreed with such assessments.

Seven years after making the

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Philip Heijmans/The Cambodia Daily

King Norodom Sihamoni presides over yesterday's Water Festival closing ceremony, applauding the efforts of Cambodia's best boat racers. The King presented nine teams with trophies marking their success in this year's races. (See story, page 19)

Bloodshed as Stampede Strikes Island Bridge

Water Festival-goers trapped in crowd, crushed on final night

By Saing Soenthrith
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The final night of Water Festival celebrations in Phnom Penh turned deadly yesterday evening as a stampede on a bridge serving Koh Pich island left nearly 200 revelers dead and hundreds more injured, authorities said.

Sirens screamed throughout Daun Penh district as authorities struggled to part seas of festival-goers to make way for ambulances, which made their way to the southernmost portion of the city's riverfront.

Shortly after 1 am, Prime Minister Hun Sen appeared on Bayon TV, saying that 180 people had been killed.

With the city's emergency responses stretched to the limit, trucks from the Prime Minister Bodyguard Unit joined a seemingly endless rotation of police trucks, ambulances and other vehicles in depositing victims at Calmette Hospital, where the dead and wounded lined the floors as hospital staff struggled to cope with the flood of patients.

By midnight, the hospital had to begin turning away ambulances, which were referred to the Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital in Chamkar Mon district. Interior Minister Sar Kheng appeared at the bridge shortly

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Cambodia Reaps Rewards From China's Billions

By John Pomfret
THE WASHINGTON POST

KOH KONG PROVINCE - Down a blood-red dirt track deep in the forests here, the roar begins. Turn a corner and there is the source—scores of dump trucks, bulldozers and backhoes hacking away at the earth. Above a massive hole, a flag flaps in the hot, dusty breeze. The flag of the People's Republic of China.

Here in the depths of the Cardamom Mountains, where the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge made their last stand in the late 1970s, China is asserting its rights as a resurgent imperial power in Asia. Instead of exporting revolution and bloodshed to its neighbors, China is now sending its cash and its people.

At the site of the clangorous hydropower Stung Tatay dam, along Cambodia's border with Thailand—and in Burma, Laos and even Vietnam—China is engaged in a massive push to extend its economic and political influence into Southeast Asia. Spreading investment and aid along with political pressure, China is transforming a huge swath of territory along its southern border. Call it the Monroe Doctrine, Chinese style.

Ignored by successive US administrations, China's rise in this region is now causing alarm in Washington, which is aggressively courting the countries of Southeast Asia. The administration of US President Barack Obama has cultivated closer ties with the old US foe, Vietnam. It has tried to open doors to Burma, which US officials believe is in danger of becoming a Chinese vassal state.

Relations have been renewed

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AND ALSO

A Gay Undertaking in Germany

REUTERS

BERLIN - Two undertakers in the German city of Cologne are trying to tap into the gay market by selling coffins adorned with images of male nudes.

The prize piece in their display window is a coffin decorated with images of mostly naked, muscular young men in athletic poses inspired by Italian Renaissance paintings.

"We believe you should be able to have a coffin that lets you embark on your last journey in a way that reflects how you lived your life," undertaker Thomas Brandl said.

The unconventional coffin, which costs about $2,300, has aroused fascination among customers, said Brandl: "People are really interested because it's so unique. Reactions have been very positive so far."

NEWSMAKERS

■ LONDON - PRINCE WILLIAM and his fiancee, KATE MIDDLETON, should be Britain's next king and queen, not the heir to the throne PRINCE CHARLES and his wife CAMILLA, the Duchess of Cornwall, two polls showed Saturday. An ICM poll, published in Britain's News of the World newspaper, showed 64 percent of people wanted William and his future bride as next in line to the throne, while a YouGov poll in the Sunday Times found the majority of Britons thought William would make a better king than his father. Charles, 62, is next in line to the throne, now occupied by his mother, Queen Elizabeth, 84. The British public has no say in who should be their next king or queen, a symbolic role in a country run as a parliamentary democracy. The ICM survey also found fewer than one in five people wanted the crown to pass to Charles and Camilla. The YouGov poll showed 44 percent thought Charles should make way for his son to become the next king. *(Reuters)*

China's...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

with Laos, whose northern half is dominated by Chinese businesses. In a speech about US policy in Asia on Oct 28, before she embarked on her sixth trip to Asia in two years, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used military terminology to refer to US efforts: "forward-deployed diplomacy."

During a recent trip to Phnom Penh—the first of a US secretary of state since 2003—Ms Clinton, while speaking to Cambodian students, was asked about Cambodia's ties to Beijing. "You don't want to get too dependent on any one country," she told them.

Still, China powers ahead.

China has concluded a free-trade deal with all 10 countries of Asean, while a similar US pact is only in its infancy. It is cementing ties with Thailand, a US ally, despite recent political unrest there.

In Cambodia, Chinese firms have turned mining and agricultural concessions in Mondolkiri province into no-go zones for Cambodian police. Guards at the gates to two of them—a gold mine and a hemp plantation—shoo travelers away unless they are able to pay a toll. "It's like a country within a country," quipped Interior Minister Sar Kheng at a law enforcement conference earlier this year, according to participants at the meeting.

China's real estate development firms have barged into Cambodia with all the ambition, bumptiousness and verve that US fruit and tire firms employed in Latin America or Africa in decades past.

One company, Union Development Group, of Tianjin in northern China, won a 99-year concession for 310 square km, twice the size of Washington, DC, of beachfront property on the Gulf of Thailand. There, Chinese work teams are cutting a road and mapping out plans for hotels, villas and golf courses. The estimated investment: $3.8 billion. The target market: the nouveau riche from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Last month, China pledged to support the construction of a $600 million stretch of railway between Phnom Penh and Vietnam that will bring China a major step closer to incorporating all of Southeast Asia, as far south as Singapore, into its rail network.

Across Cambodia, dozens of state-run Chinese companies are building eight hydropower dams, including the 246-megawatt behemoth on the Tatay river in Koh

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CORRECTIONS: Yesterday's story on attendance at Water Festival celebrations (page 19) misidentified Pong Savrith of the Phnom Penh military police. He is deputy commander, not commander. This error was repeated in yesterday's story on the arrest of a labor organizer on drug charges (page 20).

psi Cambodia

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Saing Soenthrith and Philip Heijmans/The Cambodia Daily

Left, nurses tend to the wounded outdoors at Calmette Hospital. Right, stampede victims were piled into a van at Koh Pich island last night.

Stampede...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

after midnight as rescue crews continued retrieving bodies and tending to the injured.

Survivors at the hospital said milling crowds on the waterfront had been immobilized by their own density on the bridges, causing pedestrians to faint and stampede, with many spilling into the island channel in the Bassic river.

"We were stuck on the bridge for about 30 minutes, and then people started to faint," Heang Choeun, 30, of Prey Veng, told a reporter at the hospital.

"If no one had anybody to hold on to, they fell down. It was chaos. There was no air."

Shortly after midnight, military police at the bridges could be seen removing bodies from the riverfront and Australian firefighters were also seen responding.

Death tolls seemed to mount throughout the night. By telephone, Pong Savrith, deputy Phnom Penh military police commander, said authorities were still grappling with the scale of the disaster.

"Right now, maybe 300 to 500 were hurt, including the dead," he said. "We just don't know."

At midnight, Health Minister Mam Bunheng, who was present at the hospital yesterday evening to witness the response, was informed by a doctor that 60 bodies lay at the scene of the accident and that the total number of dead would exceed 100 when combined with those at the hospital.

But half an hour later, the estimate seemed to have risen.

"Now at Calmette, there are 51 women dead and 16 men dead," Chey Sophen of the Phnom Penh military police told a reporter at the hospital.

The mayhem was a spectacular and tragic end to a ceremony that officials had said earlier had gone smoothly due to attentive planning and an alert police force.

(Additional reporting by Zsombor Peter, Porn Bopha, Tem Sokhom and Mark Worley)

Torture...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

same complaint, the committee "expressed its concern at reports that the use of forced confessions as evidence in courts is widespread," and urged the government to make those confessions inadmissible.

"The committee is also concerned that such allegations are seldom investigated and prosecuted and that there would appear to be a climate of impunity resulting in the lack of meaningful disciplinary action or criminal prosecution against persons of authority," he added.

Also as before, it urged the government to add the convention's definition of torture to its own laws.

"Such action would show a real and important recognition of torture as a serious crime and human rights abuse and fight impunity ...alerting everyone, including perpetrators, victims and the public, to the special gravity of the crime," the Committee said.

At its hearing, Cambodia repeated its old stance that the Constitution's commitment to upholding its international treaty obligations, including the Torture Convention, was enough.

But like the committee, local rights groups disagree. Without a definition in domestic law, they say, judges can too easily impose a permissive interpretation of torture.

"If the definition is not clear, it is easy for the perpetrator to escape from responsibility," said Sok Sam Oeun, director of the Cambodian Defenders Project, a legal aid NGO.

Among several other recommendations, the committee also urged Cambodia to set a sentencing scheme for government officials convicted of torture and create an independent body to investigate claims.

It also urged the government to guarantee detainees access to a lawyer within the first 24 hours.

Interior Ministry spokesman Khieu Sopheak said Cambodian law already does.

"Suspects are allowed by law to have lawyers from the first second of arrest," he said.

But to the dismay of human rights groups, the criminal procedure code in fact allows for a lawyer only after the first 24 hours, the period when most forced confessions allegedly occur. They say reports of rewards for confessions only make the matter worse.

Police may be rewarded for "good work," Mr Sopheak said, "but these awards do not encourage police to torture people for confessions and convictions. There are no cases of forced confessions from torture."

He attributed the deaths of Kong La, Mao Sok and Heng Touch—whom the torture committee inquired after by name—to a combination of liver disease and high blood pressure as determined by thorough post-mortem examinations. Human rights groups complain that such investigations remain far from independent.

Echoing a common refrain from Prime Minister Hun Sen and other top officials, he dismissed the NGOs' claims as a mere ploy for funding.

"In short, no torture exists here," he said. "I pity the people in Geneva who have been cheated by NGOs in Phnom Penh."

Licadho President Pung Chhiv Kek, meanwhile, welcomed the report's focus on the need for independent investigations and on corruption, which the Committee called "one of the most serious impediments" to tackling torture.

But she said it also missed out on calling for the immediate closure of the government's non-prison detention centers, a common request of rights groups who describe them and the scenes of regular rapes and beatings.

That this year's report includes more recommendations than 2003's, she said, "may hint to the fact that the situation has not really improved."

Cambodia still has a year to submit an official reply to the report.

Mak Sambath, deputy president of the government's human rights committee, said yesterday that he had yet to read the report but said the government would review the recommendations before deciding whether to do so.

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INTERNATIONAL

US Open to North Korea Talks Despite Its Nuclear Advances

REUTERS

SEOUL - The US and its allies yesterday accused North Korea of being a danger to the region after it showed off its latest advances in uranium enrichment, but Washington said it was still open to talks.

The reported sighting of more than a thousand centrifuges at its main nuclear complex appears to confirm the impoverished North, which already has a plutonium-based bomb, is on the way to creating a second source of weapons-grade nuclear material.

It comes just as Pyongyang is pressing regional powers to resume talks on its atomic weapons program—about the only real leverage it has with the outside world.

"It is the latest in a series of provocative moves by the DPRK.... It is a very difficult problem we have been struggling to deal with for 20 years," US envoy Stephen Bosworth said in Seoul, referring to the North by its acronym.

"This is not a crisis, we are not surprised," said Bosworth, on the first leg of a tour of East Asia.

"My crystal ball is foggy, but I would never declare any process dead," he said when asked about the fate of regional six-party talks. "We have hope that we will be able to resuscitate [them]."

The North's reported nuclear advances, including work on a light-water reactor, come nearly two months after Kim Jong Il started the transition of power to his son, Kim Jong Un. Analysts say he wants to use nuclear muscle to boost his son's credentials with the military.

Washington is particularly worried by the threat of North Korea—whose ravaged economy has long relied heavily on arms exports—selling nuclear weapons material to other states. It has conducted two nuclear tests to date and is believed to have enough fissile material to make several nuclear warheads.

The latest flurry over Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions follows comments at the weekend by Siegfried Hecker of Stanford University that he had been shown more than a thousand centrifuges during a tour of the Yongbyon nuclear complex this month. North Korea said the centrifuges were operational.

It is impossible to verify the North's claims, which it first announced last year. International inspectors were expelled from last year, but the US has said since 2002 that Pyongyang had such a program.

The North has said it wants to resume multilateral talks, but Washington and Seoul have said they will only consider a return to the negotiating table when Pyongyang shows it is sincere about denuclearization.

By showing its nuclear hand, analysts say North Korea is seeking to gain leverage in aid-for-disarmament negotiations in stalled six-way talks with regional powers China, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the US.

South Korean government officials said the latest revelations, if true, posed "a very serious problem," adding they were in keeping with Pyongyang's typical pattern of behavior.

China's...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Kong. The total price tag for those dams will exceed $1 billion. Altogether, Cambodia owes China $4 billion, said Cheam Yeap, a lawmaker and member of the permanent committee of the ruling CPP.

"This takeover is inevitable," said Lak Chee Meng, the senior reporter on the Cambodia Sin Chew Daily, one of the country's four Chinese-language dailies, serving a population of 300,000 Chinese-speaking Khmer-Chinese and an additional quarter-million immigrants and businessmen from mainland China. "Cambodia is approaching China with open arms. It's how the United States took over its neighborhood. It's geopolitics."

The perennial question about China's rise is when will Beijing be able to translate its cash into power. In Cambodia, it already has.

Cambodia has avoided criticizing Beijing over the dams China is building along China's stretch of the Mekong river—installations that experts predict will upend the lives of millions of Cambodians who live off the fishing economy around the Tonle Sap lake.

Cambodia so strictly follows Beijing's "one China" policy that it has refused Taiwan's request to open up an economic office here despite the many millions of dollars' worth of Taiwanese investment in Cambodia.

China's heft was also clearly on display in December when Chinese and US diplomats went toe-to-toe over the fate of 20 Uighur Chinese who had fled to Cambodia seeking asylum. China said that some of the men, members of a Chinese Turkic minority, were wanted for having participated in anti-Han Chinese riots in Xinjiang in July 2009. The US said do not send them back.

China threatened to cancel a trip by its vice president, Xi Junping, who was coming to Cambodia with deals and loans worth $1.2 billion in his briefcase. Cambodia returned the Uighurs to China. Two days later, Mr Xi, on track to be China's next leader, arrived in Phnom Penh.

In April of this year, the US State Department announced that to punish Cambodia, it was canceling a shipment of 200 US surplus military trucks and trailers. Less than three weeks later, China donated 257 military trucks.

Cambodia has also followed China's lead when it comes to the South China Sea, a 2.6 million-square-km waterway that China asserts belongs to Beijing. In July, Ms Clinton, speaking in Hanoi, challenged China's claims to the open seas and advocated a multilateral approach to divvying up the fishing rights and offshore oil and gas that the sea is believed to contain. China opposes multilateral negotiations, preferring to divide and conquer with bilateral talks. Last month, Prime Minister Hun Sen backed China's approach.

China's one-upmanship with the US continued earlier this month. A day after Ms Clinton left Cambodia, Wu Bangguo, one of China's top Communist Party officials, arrived in Phnom Penh. During her visit, Ms Clinton had raised the possibility that the US might forgive a portion of Cambodia's debt to the US; it owes $445 million. Mr Wu was more forthright. He struck $4.5 million off Cambodia's tab; Chinese officials are considering forgiving an additional $200 million.

China's road to domination here has not been without potholes. Vietnam, which ousted the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979 leading to the installation of Mr Hun Sen, has woken up to the threat of increased Chinese influence and has directed Vietnamese state-owned companies to pour money into Cambodia. From $28 million in 2008, Vietnamese investment jumped to $268 million in 2009 and to $1.2 billion this year, according to Cambodian government statistics.

The Vietnamese military runs Cambodia's number two, soon to be number one telecommunications company, Metfone. Many government officials use its services because it gives them SIM cards loaded with free minutes.

But China is quick to counter Vietnam. Chinese and Cambodian officials this month signed a $591 million loan package, Cambodia's biggest ever, from the Bank of China for Cambodia's other main telecommunications company. The only catch is that $500 million was earmarked to buy Chinese equipment from the Chinese telecom giant Huawei.

Mr Hun Sen has sometimes chafed at the bear hug from Beijing. In December, Chinese workers finished the massive $30 million Council of Ministers building, where the prime minister was supposed to house his offices. But Mr Hun Sen did not like the place, complained about its squat toilets and the fact that "it didn't even have a proper chandelier," according to a Western diplomat. There were also concerns that China had bugged the premises. So Mr Hun Sen built new offices next door and opened both buildings last month.

China has exercised imperial sway over Cambodia for centuries. Eight hundred years ago, Chinese troops bailed out Khmer kings; friendly Chinese warriors are carved on the side of the famed 12th-century Bayon temple near Angkor Wat. In the 1950s and 1960s, Communist China embraced the regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk and later provided the Khmer Rouge with inspiration, security and economic assistance throughout their bloody rule from 1975 to 1979. Norodom Sihanouk, now 88 and the king-father, resides in Beijing.

Huo Zhaoguo, a Chinese manager of Union Development's massive project along the Cambodian coast, is typical of the new Chinese coming to this country. In the 1980s in Lanzhou in northwestern China, Mr Huo struck it rich selling beans but then lost his fortune. He washed up in Cambodia in the 1990s, chasing a Vietnamese dealer who owed him money. Mr Huo returned to Lanzhou penniless but could not stay. "I'd been rich there once and so everybody laughed at me," he said. "A man needs self-respect."

Mr Huo moved back to Cambodia and opened a noodle stand. He moved up to a noodle restaurant and then met the boss of Union Development, who came to his shop searching for northern Chinese food. The boss gave Mr Huo a chance at Union, and now Mr Huo is overseeing road construction. Union got the land because it had cash and connections, Mr Huo said.

"This country is too poor and the corruption is the same as China," he observed. "If you have power here, you have a great future."

"Cambodians feel no pressure to succeed. They even take weekends off. Not us," he said, with the air of colonial supremacy many Chinese in Cambodia have. "We work."

Activist Relies on Islam to Fight for Animal Rights in Egypt

By Robert Worth
THE NEW YORK TIMES

CAIRO - It is never easy to be an animal rights activist in the Arab world. But on Id al-Adha, the annual Muslim religious holiday when the streets run red with the blood of slaughtered sheep, cows and camels, it is a nightmare.

"Ah, I can't stand it!" wailed Amina Abaza, wincing as she drove through a gauntlet of hanging carcasses and entrails, with sheep bleating all around her. "Islam is all about compassion, but we don't practice it!"

An ebullient 55-year-old with blond hair, Abaza has spent a decade campaigning to spare the animals, or at least require more humane slaughtering methods. She has a long way to go.

The scene in Cairo's Sayyida Zeinab neighborhood last Tuesday was fairly typical: camels bellowed as blood-soaked butchers wrestled dozens of animals to the ground and slashed their throats.

Neighbors leaned out their windows to watch and cheer, or snap pictures. Little boys daubed their hands in the blood and spattered one another, and teenagers helped remove steaming entrails from the carcasses. Scores of people pressed forward to buy fresh meat for the ritual holiday meal, standing in puddles of gore.

For most Muslims, the holiday, which ended Friday night, is a joyful time with a charitable theme: according to tradition, a third of the slaughtered meat is to be given to relatives, and a third to the poor. It is a welcome gift in Egypt, where the price of meat has been rising.

What bothers Abaza and other activists is not the principle of Id al-Adha—the Feast of Sacrifice—which commemorates the biblical story in which God allows Abraham to slaughter a ram instead of his own son. Nor do they object to animal slaughter itself (Abaza is not a vegetarian).

Instead, they complain that many butchers fail to abide even by Islam's own strictures: that the animal should not be mistreated, and should not see or hear other animals being killed.

Amateurs slaughter their own sheep at home in many Arab countries, with no special training on how to spare the animals pain.

It is common to see men hurling terrified sheep into the backs of trucks, and beating the animals as they herd them to the killing grounds. In abattoirs, some workers sodomize the beasts with knives to drive them into the pens, Abaza said.

"If you want to give a good image of Muslims and the Quran, why do you do this?" Abaza said, her voice rising in indignation. "Why are we Muslims the ones known for this kind of behavior?"

Abaza and a small but growing band of fellow activists have had some impact. In 2006 she helped an Australian reporter film at a slaughterhouse with a hidden camera. It created a scandal in Australia, and soon afterward the Australian government suspended shipping live sheep to Egypt.

That got Abaza some attention, most of it negative. "People think we are attacking Islam," she said. "They accuse you of being an American, a Jew, a Freemason."

It is true that Westerners tend to recoil a bit from the mass slaughter that takes place on Id al-Adha, despite the reality that plenty of animals are slaughtered in the West in ways that make animal rights activists cringe. Muslims can be sensitive about the Western reaction, and Abaza, who comes from a Francophone family, is an easy target.

When she first started her organization in 2001, the Society for the Protection of Animal Rights in Egypt, her rhetoric was largely borrowed from similar Western groups.

"Then I discovered that there are animal rights in Islam," she said. "Once we started using the Islamic arguments, they didn't attack us as much."

Some religious authorities agree with Abaza, but they rarely raise their voices.

"Muslims are passing through a period of degeneration where they are applying the Shariah law circumstantially and moodily," said Sheik Ahmed al-Baba, a prominent Sunni cleric.

"Some ordinary people...don't know we are obliged not to harm the animal."

Abaza chose to celebrate the holiday in her own unique way. She drove to the local sheep market, where she bought a female sheep for $175, and loaded it into the back of her truck.

"Baaaa!" she said as she drove to her farm. "You're lucky!"

Burkina Faso Leader Appeals To Voters, But Turnout Is Thin

REUTERS

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso - Burkina Faso leader Blaise Compaore appealed to voters on Sunday to cast their ballot in a presidential election where he was seen as the clear favorite, but witnesses said turnout in the West African state was thin.

Compaore, 59, has carved himself a niche as an important and sometimes controversial power-broker in the unstable region, with analysts in particular citing his role in pushing for a return to civilian rule in Guinea.

The poll went smoothly but without any mass participation from voters unimpressed either by the campaign promises of Compaore or his six opponents.

"Voters should turn out in large numbers for this election because it is an opportunity for us to take stock and also to plan for the future," Compaore said as he voted at a booth in Ouagadougou.

The results are are due to be published by Thursday.

"It's a foregone conclusion," said teacher Omar Tapsoba. "I am voting just to ease my conscience, because I don't want to think that tomorrow this government will still be in power because I didn't cast my vote."

Compaore seized power in a 1987 coup. Despite allowing multi-party politics, he has faced little or no real opposition in a gold-mining and cotton-producing country where income per head is half the average for sub-Saharan Africa.

Compaore won the 2005 election with an overwhelming 80.3 percent. A weak turnout among the 3.3 million registered voters would nonetheless undermine the credibility of Sunday's result.

A landlocked country of 15 million people, Burkina Faso has avoided instability, but it is stuck at 161st place out of 169 countries on the UN's Human Development Index.

"It's true, here, we haven't got anything, but at least we have peace," said pensioner Alfred Ilboudo. "This isn't perhaps the best regime but I am voting for peace—just look around us."

INTERNATIONAL

Mired in Crises, Haiti Struggles to Focus on Upcoming Election

BY RANDAL ARCHIBOLD AND DAMIEN CAVE
THE NEW YORK TIMES

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Crushed buildings from the January earthquake still spill out onto sidewalks here, people are collapsing from cholera at hospital doors and a wave of rioting last week reminded Haitians of the political turmoil of the past.

It may not be the best time to choose a president.

But the election this coming Sunday may be Haiti's most important in decades. Not only are competing crises demanding attention, but with the country poised to receive billions of dollars in international reconstruction money, the new president will have a historic ability to reshape the country, from its economy to its justice system to deciding where and how to house more than a million earthquake refugees.

A colorful field of 19 candidates is seeking the highest office in the hemisphere's poorest country, including a professorial former first lady who would be the first woman elected president, a popular entertainer best known for dropping his pants on stage and a taciturn government minister handpicked by the current, increasingly unpopular president. All but the last have offered forceful criticism of Haitian President Rene Preval's response to the earthquake, promising careful, fraud-free management of the aid windfall, although providing few specifics.

Jose Miguel Insulza, the secretary general of the Organization of American States, said: "The big problem is to get out the vote".

"There are a lot of people who left town because of the earthquake."

"There are people afraid of the cholera.... There are so many obstacles to getting people to vote."

A low turnout—below 40 percent, according to some analysts—could raise claims that the election was illegitimate. Many people lost their national identification cards—which are required to vote—in the quake, while others fled Port-au-Prince and have not changed their registration.

The government authority that issues the ID cards said it had registered 30,000 more than the 400,000 it anticipated in the last quarter, the cutoff for the election. While some of that surge may be related to tighter banking rules, which also require the card for certain transactions, it may also reflect some electoral excitement.

Widner Saint-Jean, 24, beamed—"My heart is pounding," he said—as he was handed a replacement identification card for one he lost in 2005.

"I hope my vote will help reconstruct the country, to change the lives of poor people."

To combat the fraud that has marked past elections, several dozen international observers will monitor the balloting. The US is providing $14 million in election-related aid to help pay for voting supplies, international observers and other needs.

Most candidates and political analysts doubt a clear winner will emerge on Sunday, setting up a runoff for the two leading candidates on Jan 16 .

Getting the electorate to focus on the election and not the country's troubles remains a challenge. The cholera outbreak in particular is reshaping the race. It led to rioting last week, with crowds directing their anger at foreign troops.

Polling here is considered sketchy, but the local news media have focused their attention on a handful of candidates.

They include Marlinde Manigat, the former first lady; Jude Celestin, President Preval's preferred successor; and Michel Martelly, a kompa singer formerly known as "Sweet Micky," who draws large crowds and is banking on votes that might have gone to Wyclef Jean, the Haitian-American pop star who was barred from running by the country's electoral commission.

Several candidates said privately that they believed the international community was awaiting the outcome of the election before committing to more aid.

US aid to the reconstruction effort was hung up in Congress for months until the delivery of $120 million this month, about a tenth of what was pledged to the Haiti Reconstruction Fund, and several other countries were also slow in delivering aid.

"Relative to presidents of the past, this president is going to have an enormous opportunity with significant resources," said Mark Schneider, a Haiti expert at the International Crisis Group.

It remains to be seen how much the voters are buying. Haitians, analysts said, tend to make their choices at the last minute.

'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Report To Be Released Day Earlier

BY ED O'KEEFE
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON - Signaling the growing seriousness of the administration of US President Barack Obama's commitment this year to ending the military's ban on gays serving openly in the armed forces, the US Defense Department said Sunday that it will release a long-awaited report on the matter earlier than planned because senators are keen to vote on whether to repeal the policy.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has ordered the report to be released on Nov 30, one day earlier than planned, "to support Congress' wish to consider repeal before they adjourn," US Department of Defense spokesman Geoff Morrell said Sunday.

The US Senate is slated to vote again on a defense policy bill that includes language that would repeal the "don't ask, don't tell" policy after the Thanksgiving recess. The measure did not advance in September.

Several senators asked Gates last week to release the report early. Several moderate senators have said they will not decide how to vote until they read the report.

Gates "wants to ensure members of the Armed Services Committee are able to read and consider the complex, lengthy report before holding hearings with its authors and the Joint Chiefs of Staff," Morrell said in a statement.

The report is expected to conclude that the military can lift the ban on gays serving openly in uniform with only minimal and isolated incidents of risk to the current war efforts, according to sources.

The report will cite a survey of active-duty and reserve troops that found that more than 70 percent of respondents said the effect of lifting the ban would be positive, mixed or nonexistent, sources said.

About 40 percent of the Marine Corps is concerned about lifting the ban, one of the sources said.

Steamy Spanish Electoral Ad Campaign Turns Some Voters On

BY ROBERT MACKEY
THE NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK - Apparently desperate to pique the interest of young voters ahead of local elections in Catalonia scheduled for later this month, political parties in the Spanish region are engaged in what is starting to seem like a race to see which of them can get their entire campaign banned for excessive use of sex or violence.

The first blow was struck by the new Catalan Solidarity for Independence Party, which recruited a porn star named Maria Lapiedra to appear at its campaign rallies.

Not to be outdone, the conservative Popular Party posted a video game on its website this week starring an animated version of its local leader, Alicia Sanchez-Camacho, flying through the air on a white seagull, bombing illegal immigrants and Catalan nationalists. The video was later removed.

The same day, another candidate, Montse Nebrera, who leads her own party, appeared in an ad wearing just a towel.

By week's end, though, politicians across the political spectrum were weighing in on another steamy ad that topped them all, in which a young actress was shown simulating an orgasm as she cast her vote for Spain's Socialist Party.

The ad, which was produced by the Young Socialists of Catalonia—to illustrate their slogan, "Voting is a pleasure"—makes a somewhat similar scene in the movie "When Harry Met Sally" look tame by comparison.

So far it has been viewed more than 280,000 times on YouTube, which comes close to qualifying as a viral hit.

A spokesman for the conservative Convergence and Union Party, Josep Antoni Duran Lleida, called the ad "crude."

Bibiana Aido, Spain's equality minister, who is a Socialist, said: "If it was true, electoral participation would go up greatly."

Minebea (Cambodia)Co.,Ltd.

Minebea

Minebea (Cambodia) Co., Ltd. is a Subsidiary of Minebea Co., Ltd., a Japanese Giant Manufacturer of Miniature Ball Bearings, Precision Motor and Electronic Devices. Minebea's operations cover 30 manufacturing sites in 10 countries with 52 sales offices in many countries around the world by employing more than 56,000 employees.

Minebea is expanding precision motor assembly factory in Phnom Penh in April 2011, which will be located in Phnom Penh Special Economics Zone (PPSEZ), National Road No. 4, Khan Dangkor, Phnom Penh.

Minebea (Cambodia) Co., Ltd. would like to invite the qualified candidates to join our business growth in Cambodia. Some of employees will have training in Japan, Thailand and Malaysia with excellent and friendly working environment.

Successful candidates will be offered attractive compensation package, career opportunity with positive atmosphere.

Manufacturing Engineer

Responsibility :

- Co-operate with production to improve process efficiency
- To start up of new product and support product change management
- To improve production efficiency and planning production control

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 21-30
- Bachelor's degree in Industrial, Electrical, Electronics Mechatronics or related field

Manufacturing Supervisor

Responsibility :

- Plan capacity for daily weekly and monthly for production
- Planning, Production, Material, Quality Control
- Issue manufacturing order with relevant documents for Manufacturing
- Prepare lot status and summary reports to customers
- Responsible other concerning job

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 21-30
- Bachelor's degree in Industrial Management, General Management, Science or Any Field

Account Staff

Responsibility :

- Responsible for daily posting :Invoice, Receipt, Payment voucher cheque and withholding tax.
- Control fixed assets of company,
- Prepare reconciliation for the account and fix assets.
- Prepare product cost monthly report.
- Review production expense in each profit center.
- Monitor cost accounting records and ensure that they are in compliance with the legal requirement as well company's standard

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 20-25
- Bachelor's degree in Accounting
- Good computer literacy in MS. Office, SPSS

Quality Control

Responsibility :

- Part inspection control
- Analyze quality information
- To issue claimed report
- Follow up and monitoring about corrective action
- To be in charge of IQC and OQC activities such as managing in coming - outgoing inspection of products

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 21-30
- Bachelor's degree in Any field.

Interpreter

Responsibility :

- Interpret Cambodian-Thai & English or Cambodian - Japanese

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 21-30
- Bachelor's degree in Foreign Language (Thai/Japanese/English)

Purchase & Store Staff

Responsibility :

- Purchasing Control, Deal with Vendors to meet with Company's need.
- Store Control, Basic cost management and monthly report

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 22-25 years old
- Bachelor's degree in Marketing, English, Business Admin
- Able to communicate in English, Chinese, Thai
- Good computer literacy
- Pleasant personality with service mind.
- Negotiation skill and general business concept

IT Technician Support

Responsibility :

- Maintain PC Servers, Network Set up & Maintain PC
- IT Support Help Desk and User requirement Management

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 21-30
- Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, Information Technology
- Able to communicate in English, Thai
- PC Install & Set up Knowledge
- Computer Software Knowledge

Logistics Supervisor
Logistics Staff

Responsibility :

- Supervisor : Management for Logistics
- Staff : Job Import and Tax exemption job, Export Job

Qualifications :

- Male/Female,
- Age between 25-40 years old and at least 5 years in Logistics field experience for Supervisor
- Age between 22-30 years old for Staff
- Bachelor's degree in Logistics, Trading Business
- Computer base knowledge

Legal & Privilege Staff

Responsibility :

- Responsible for report of Build of Materials (BOM)
- Contract with Government Sector concerning foreign investment in Cambodia
- Co-ordinate with Production, Logistics and Account Division
- Documents preparation for cutting balance of Material

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 21-30 years old
- Bachelor's degree in Mathematics, Statistics, English, General Management
- Able to communicate in English, Thai
- Able to handle figures report
- High complicate job with service mind

HRA Staff

Responsibility :

- Recruitment, Training, Payroll, Industrial Relation, Welfare Process
- Coordinate with Government Div.
- Coordinate with Manpower Agency
- General HRA & Administration job concern

Qualifications :

- Male/Female, age between 21-30 years old
- Bachelor's degree in General Management, English, Political Science, Psychology, HRM
- Able to communicate in English, Thai, Chinese is an advantage

Interested candidates or freshly graduated are invited to send their CV in English with clearly stating the position as details shown to: recruitment @ PPSEZ.com or PPSEZ Attwood Business Centre.
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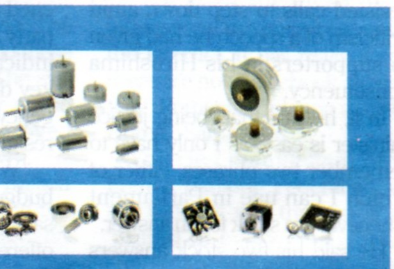
Appointment for interviewing will be contacted right away.
Interviewing schedule for the appropriate candidates will be during Nov. 30, Dec. 1-2 , 2010 at PPSEZ Main office at Attwood Business Center.



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New Zealand Mine Rescuers Prepare for Deaths, Police Say

Shaft to test for explosive gases nears completion, but police fear not all trapped miners will survive

By Adam Gabbatt
THE GUARDIAN

LONDON - Police in New Zealand have acknowledged for the first time yesterday that they are preparing for "loss of life," as a borehole into the mine where 29 men are trapped neared completion yesterday morning.

Authorities were expected to finish drilling the 15-cm-wide shaft into the mine tunnel late yesterday, providing a better idea of the air quality inside the area where miners were believed trapped by Friday's blast. The army is preparing to send a robot normally used for bomb disposal down the shaft to check conditions and record video underground.

Two Britons are among those trapped in the Pike River mine in Greymouth, on New Zealand's South Island, following the explosion, which is believed to have been caused by a methane gas leak.

"We still remain optimistic; we're still keeping an open mind," said police superintendent Gary Knowles.

"But we are planning for all outcomes, and as part of this process we're planning for the possible loss of life as a result of what's occurred underground."

Reuters
Explosion survivor Daniel Rockhouse hugs the family member of a trapped Pike River coal miner in Greymouth, New Zealand, yesterday.

Two workers stumbled out of the Pike River mine within hours of the explosion on Friday, but there has been no contact with the missing 29. A phone line deep inside the mine has rung unanswered for days.

The New Zealand Herald reported this morning that 135 meters of the 162-meter tunnel to the mine has been completed, however tests every 30 minutes on areas currently accessible continued to indicate the air was too toxic for rescuers to enter.

Army specialists are at the mine site fitting a robot usually used for bomb disposal with a camera and up to 2.4 kilometers of fiber-optic cable, so it could be sent into the tunnel to check conditions and take video.

But the battery-operated robot only works in fresh air, so it cannot be sent into the mine until the air clears. Methane and other toxic gases—some of them believed to be coming from a smouldering fire deep underground—have been detected in the network of tunnels that threads through a mountain, and officials fear another explosion could occur if rescuers enter.

Checks are also underway to make sure the robot would not cause a spark or anything else that could ignite flammable gases inside.

Police have said the miners are believed to be about 1.9 kilometers down the tunnel. Although Knowles said rescuers were preparing for all eventualities, New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said yesterday there was "every chance" the 24 New Zealanders, two Australians, two Britons and one South African, were still alive.

"The advice I have is that there is oxygen in the mine and there is every chance that those miners have managed to get to a pocket of that oxygen flow and therefore that they are alive," he said.

Key added that although these were "testing and difficult times," it was imperative the rescue team acted "in a way that doesn't endanger their [the miners'] lives."

Each miner carried 30 minutes-worth of oxygen, and more fresh air was stored in the mine, along with food and water that could allow several days of survival, officials said.

Japan's Justice Minister Resigns Over Gaffe Made in Speech

Resignation expected to add to problems facing Prime Minister Naoto Kan, whose popularity has plummeted

By Justin McCurry
THE GUARDIAN

OSAKA, Japan - The Japanese justice minister yesterday bowed to pressure to resign after being accused of making light of the parliamentary process when he remarked how "easy" his job was.

Minoru Yanagida, an upper house member for the Democratic party of Japan, had initially resisted calls to step down amid criticism of a speech he had given to supporters in his Hiroshima constituency.

In it, he said that "being justice minister is easy, as I only have to remember two phrases, either of which I can use in Parliament whenever I'm stuck for an answer."

He said his two stock answers were: "'I will not comment on specific cases' and 'We are dealing with the matter in line with the law and evidence.'"

While Yanagida's candor will not surprise anyone who has witnessed the formulaic nature of many ministerial question-and-answer sessions, critics were quick to accuse him of lacking respect for the parliamentary process.

Yanagida's position had weakened after the Liberal Democratic party and other opposition groups indicated they would boycott a key debate on a $53 billion emergency stimulus package unless he resigned.

"We need to pass the extra budget as soon as possible for the sake of people's livelihoods, so I offered to resign after speaking to the prime minister," Yanagida told reporters.

His resignation is expected to add to the problems facing the Japanese prime minister, Naoto Kan, whose popularity has plummeted over his handling of the economy and recent territorial rows with China and Russia.

Speculation is mounting that Kan—Japan's fifth prime minister since 2006—will be forced to call a snap general election in the spring if opposition parties succeed in delaying implementation of the main budget for next year.

Kan had refused to sack Yanagida, but was forced to accept his resignation after coming under renewed pressure from the LDP and members of his own Democratic Party of Japan.

Local media reports said the LDP was planning to add to the government's woes by pushing ahead with a non-binding censure motion against the former justice minister.

Yanagida is the first ministerial casualty since Kan reshuffled his cabinet after dealing with a leadership challenge in September, only two months into his premiership.

In a poll published in the Mainichi newspaper yesterday, public support for the cabinet fell to a low of 26 percent, down 23 percentage points from last month.

Disapproval of the cabinet's performance rose from 34 percent last month to 57 percent over the weekend, the newspaper said, adding that 71 percent believed Yanagida should resign.

Yoshito Sengoku, the chief cabinet secretary, will serve as the justice minister until a permanent appointment is made.

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US Hikers Held In Iran Given 2011 Trial Date

By Haroon Siddique
THE GUARDIAN

LONDON - Iran has set a trial date next year for three US citizens arrested near the country's border with Iraq and charged with spying.

The three, one of whom was released on bail and returned to the US, have been ordered to appear in court on Feb 6 charged with espionage and illegally crossing the border. Their lawyer, Masoud Shafiei, said he received an official notification of the trial date Sunday and was "very disappointed" by the delay.

"Each single day added to my clients' detention is a burden on my conscience and mind," he told the Los Angeles Times.

The trial was supposed to start on Nov 6, but authorities said they delayed it because Sarah Shourd, who was released on $500,000 bail in September, had not been summoned back to the country to appear in court.

Shourd, 32, was freed on health grounds and permitted to leave the country. Her mother said that while imprisoned, she had been denied treatment for serious health problems, including a breast lump and pre-cancerous cervical cells. Shourd's fiance, Shane Bauer, and their friend, Josh Fattal, both 28, remain in prison.

Their families say that, when arrested in July 2009, the three were hiking in the Kurdistan region in Iraq's scenic north and that if they had crossed the border, they did so unwittingly.

There had been suggestions that Shourd's release was linked to the return to Iran in July of Shahram Amiri, a nuclear scientist, but these were rejected by the Iranian prosecutor. Iran had accused the US of abducting Amiri, while Washington said he was a willing defector who changed his mind. In the past, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president, has suggested the three Americans could be traded for Iranians he claims the US is holding.

The US and Iran have had no diplomatic ties since the 1979 revolution, and tensions are running high over Iran's nuclear program and wider regional differences.

Friends of the three facing trial say that they had, ironically, been deeply critical of US Middle East policy and had worked with Palestinian and Iraqi refugees.

Operation Trident May Be Ditched in Budget Cuts

Unit dedicated to investigating violent crime among London's blacks at risk

By Rajeev Syal
THE GUARDIAN

LONDON - The police unit dedicated to investigating violent crime in London's black communities is at risk of being disbanded because of government cuts, the Guardian has learned.

Operation Trident, set up 12 years ago to tackle a rise in gun attacks among London's African-Caribbean community, may be merged with other Metropolitan police crime squads following the comprehensive spending review.

A high-ranking officer raised that possibility at a meeting of Trident's independent advisory group earlier this month, a senior police source said.

The disclosure prompted anger from leading black figures who believe that Trident, backed by high-profile campaigns and a dedicated intelligence unit, has improved the often distrustful relationship between police and black people in London.

Member of Parliament Diane Abbott said any plans to scrap Operation Trident would be "ludicrous and dangerous."

She said: "I have great respect for the work that Trident does. Rather than scrapping Operation Trident, the Met should be extending its methods to other communities with similar issues. Gun crime is on the increase in London, and in my constituency of Hackney, Operation Trident plays a huge part in solving crimes on a day-to-day basis. Cutting back its efforts would be a huge loss and will put Londoners at greater risk."

Claudia Webbe, head of the Trident independent advisory group, declined to comment on the meeting held two weeks ago, but said she and other advisory group members were "clearly worried" by what could happen to Trident following government cuts.

"Trident has successfully demonstrated that it is a powerful partnership between the police and the community in tackling the disproportionate effects of gun crime on black communities...despite previous policing failures and charges of 'institutional racism,'" she said.

Operation Trident was set up in 1998 in response to the murders of Avril Johnson, a DJ from south London, and Michelle Carby, from east London, who were gunned down in their homes.

The killings came amid fears of a wave of gang-related violence linked to crack cocaine trafficking and a more aggressive gun culture. Officers were finding the cases difficult to investigate, as fear of reprisals meant witnesses were afraid to come forward, and there was a general distrust of the police.

The unit, the first of its kind in Britain, was established to help officers in local police stations investigate shootings and collate intelligence from across the capital on suspected gunmen, firearms suppliers and gun converters. It now has 350 investigative officers and 98 support staff. Since April this year, it has investigated 224 shootings, including 12 murders.

Over the past 12 years, the unit has conducted more than 300 successful investigations, including the conviction in 2004 of Owen Clark—a drug kingpin whose operation, involving crack cocaine and gun crime, stretched from northwest London to the Caribbean.

All police forces are facing a 20 percent cut in funding following the spending review. The accountancy firm KPMG has estimated that 18,000 officer and civilian posts nationwide could be at risk, but frontline cuts could be avoided if radical workforce reforms go ahead.

Eric Cantona's Call for Protest Sparks Campaign

By Kim Willsher
THE OBSERVER

LONDON - As students and public sector workers across Europe prepare for a winter of protests, they have been offered advice from the archetypal football rebel Eric Cantona.

Cantona was once a famous exponent of direct action against adversaries on and off the pitch. In 1995, he was given a nine-month ban after launching a karate kick at a Crystal Palace fan who shouted racist abuse at the former Manchester United star after he was sent off. But while sympathizing with the predicament of the protesters in France, the now retired Cantona is urging a more sophisticated approach to dissent.

The 44-year-old former footballer recommended a run on the cash reserves of the world's banks during a newspaper interview that was also filmed. The interview has become a YouTube hit and has spawned a new political movement.

The regional newspaper Presse Ocean in Nantes had asked Cantona about his work with the Abbe Pierre Foundation, which campaigns for housing for the destitute and for which he produced a book of photographs last year. But the discussion soon moved on to other issues, including the demonstrations in France and elsewhere against government cutbacks in the new era of austerity.

Cantona dismissed protesters who take to the streets with placards and banners as passe. Instead, he said, they should create a social and economic revolution by taking their money out of their bank.

He said: "I don't think we can be entirely happy seeing such misery around us. Unless you live in a pod. But then there is a chance...there is something to do. Nowadays what does it mean to be on the streets? To demonstrate? You swindle yourself.

"We don't pick up weapons to kill people to start the revolution. The revolution is really easy to do these days. What's the system? The system is built on the power of the banks. So it must be destroyed through the banks.

"This means that the 3 million people with their placards on the streets, they go to the bank and they withdraw their money and the banks collapse. Three million, 10 million people, and the banks collapse and there is no real threat."

Cantona's call appeared to touch a popular chord and generated an instant response. Nearly 40,000 people have clicked on the YouTube clip, and a French-based movement—StopBanque—has taken up the campaign for a massive coordinated withdrawal of money from banks on Dec 7. It is claimed that more than 14,000 people are already committed to removing deposits. The movement is also gaining increasing attention in Britain.

Yann Sarfati, 24, an actor and director from France, said he and his friends had simply wanted to pass on Cantona's video clip, but had found themselves caught up in a global "citizens' movement."

"We were surprised by the interest and the buzz it created on the Internet. It has really spread; there are now Facebook events in Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and even Korea," Sarfati said.

Valerie Ohannesian, of the French Banking Federation, said she thought that the appeal was "stupid in every sense" and a charter for thieves and money-launderers. "My first reaction is to laugh. It is totally idiotic," she said.

The Asahi Shimbun theguardian TheObserver Le Monde

Israeli Soldiers Who Used Child as Human Shield Avoid Jail

By Harriet Sherwood
THE GUARDIAN

JERUSALEM - Two Israeli soldiers who used a 9-year-old Palestinian boy as a human shield were given suspended sentences and demoted after being convicted of "inappropriate conduct."

The unnamed soldiers, from the Givati Brigade, ordered Majed Rabah, from the Tel al-Hawa neighborhood in Gaza City, to check bags for explosives in January 2009, toward the end of Israel's three-week offensive.

The pair, who completed their compulsory military service 18 months ago, were convicted last month after a closed military trial that became a cause celebre among soldiers who claim they are being victimized following international criticism over Israel's actions during the war.

The Israel Defense Force handbook forbids the use of human shields, which is known as "neighbor procedure."

Both soldiers were given three-month sentences, suspended for two years and were demoted from staff sergeant to sergeant. They had faced a maximum of three years in prison. The military judges said the soldiers did not have immunity for their actions, but the court could not "ignore the difficult conditions in which fighters sent by the state of Israel had to operate."

The sentence—described as "light" by Army Radio—was criticized by the boy's mother, Alaf Rabah. "This is a scandal that just encourages others to continue in this behavior, which sends a negative message to both the victims and the soldiers," she told the Ynet website. The family is considering a civil action.

The soldiers' lawyer, Ilan Katz, said he was satisfied with the outcome, adding that it showed a criminal trial was inappropriate.

"We could have reached a settlement without having to put the [soldiers] through this ordeal.... We need people like these in the military," Katz said.

Majed was among dozens of men, women and children who were sheltering in a basement when the soldiers forced him to open a bag at gunpoint, according to the boy's affidavit, given to Defence for Children International, which filed a complaint against the Israeli army.

"I thought they would kill me," Majed said. "I became very scared and wet my pants. I could not shout or say anything because I was too afraid.... I opened the bag as he pointed his weapon directly at me. I emptied the bag on the floor. It contained money and papers. I looked at him and he was laughing."

The boy said he was grabbed by the hair and slapped across the face by a soldier when he could not open a second bag. "He then shot at the bag.... I thought he shot at me, so I shouted and put my hands on my head.... Another soldier said: 'Go to your mother.' I ran to my mother and hid in her arms. 'I wet my pants,' I said to her. 'It's fine,' she said."

The child has been traumatized since the incident, according to his family, and has been demanding that the door of their home is locked at all the times.

Gerard Horton, of DCI, said: "The sentence shows that the army and military justice system does not take its obligation to protect civilians seriously."

He said the case was brought under pressure following the UN's Goldstone report into the war, which accused both Israel and Hamas of committing war crimes. "If there's a lot of pressure, and people are looking, [the army] will do something, but there's no substance to it."

Sarit Michaeli, of the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, said: "Although individual soldiers do bear responsibility if they have violated rules, this has to be accompanied by systematic examination of issues of policy—such as what constitutes a legitimate target, open fire regulations, types of weapons used and the targeting of public buildings. The main issues of concern that we have raised have not been dealt with."

The ruling was welcomed by Israeli politician Otniel Schneller. "The judges showed the appropriate level of balance between meticulously following IDF orders and Jewish moral values and the responsibility for maintaining the initiative and decisiveness of IDF soldiers when in battle," he told Ynet.

Scores of people, including soldiers, demonstrated outside the court during the trial wearing T-shirts saying "We are all victims of Goldstone."

Approximately 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed during the Gaza war.

For African Catholics, Fear of AIDS Comes Second to Fear of God

By David Smith
THE GUARDIAN

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa - Before evening mass at downtown Johannesburg's Holy Trinity Catholic church, a group of Congolese students were trying Sunday to decode and digest the pope's apparent break from traditional doctrine on the use of condoms.

Africa is the global center of HIV/AIDS infections. It is also home to an estimated 158 million Catholics. By 2025, it is predicted, one-sixth of the world's Catholics—about 230 million—will be African. The church's sphere of influence includes Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Condoms were acceptable "in certain cases" such as male prostitution, Benedict XVI had said. What did the people gathered at the Holy Trinity, which sits above an HIV clinic, make of that?

Djoscky Bindusa Mongenda Tapo, 38, was wrestling with contradictions between religion and science. "The pope, as the leader of the church and as a Christian, is wrong to say this," he said. "But scientifically he is also the leader of many people, and he is right to protect them.

"As a Christian, as a spiritual fact, we cannot accept the use of condoms because, to us, marriage is between one man and one woman. The church has forbidden the use of condoms even if you are officially married because, if it allowed them, it also allows people to go around with prostitutes. Scientifically, the condoms are helping to protect people from the spread of many sicknesses and prevent premature pregnancies. Sex without condoms is a risk to people's health and their families."

He concluded: "Both sides are good but, as Christians, we are not afraid of sickness or to die, but we are afraid of the law of God. As God said one man is for one woman, we cannot go against God for other reasons. But if you are not Christian, you can use condoms if you have partners outside marriage."

AIDS activists have condemned the Vatican's stance for legitimizing ignorance about safe sex, resulting in countless needless deaths.

The pope fanned the flames last year when, on his first visit to Africa, he asserted that condoms were not the solution to HIV and could in fact make the problem worse.

South Africa has the world's biggest HIV caseload and a death toll of nearly 1,000 people a day. But Catholics gathering at the 72-year-old Holy Trinity had mixed views on the pope's apparent U-turn and its implications for the continent.

Frank Lessaka, a student from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where about half the population is Catholic, said the pope had a duty to put doctrine first: "The medical side is right, but he is contradicting the religious side. Legally, he must emphasize the religious side. The danger is that people will misunderstand what the pope is saying. He is trying to explain the use of condoms to stop HIV, but in a religious way he's wrong."

Lessaka, 23, added: "Ask first of all why use a condom, who with, which moment? In a marriage, it is advisable if you are sick. But if the pope is urging people to use condoms outside a marriage, the pope is wrong. Abstinence and fidelity are the most advisable."

But Alain Mupundu, 30, another Congolese Catholic, strongly disagreed. "In 1998, the prevalence of HIV in my country was 0.8 percent. Now it is 8 percent—10 times greater. We are not all doing abstinence and fidelity. We want to be safe now. It is time to change.

"The pope has talked to the cardinals and I think this was the result of that consultation. After saying we can't use condoms, we lost too many friends, but now we can change and save some of them. The pope has said the right thing at the right time."

Elsewhere at the church, a group of gay and lesbians were also meeting. "For the sake of reducing HIV, it's the right thing to use protection, especially in Africa," said Tendai Maposa, 30, who has Catholic friends who are HIV-positive. "The Catholic church's ignorance has been damaging. It must now educate people about HIV so they practice safe sex."

Bongani Mtlhavani, 21, a PR and media consultant, agreed: "This statement has been long overdue—it's about time. The Catholic Church has got a huge following in Africa. Its ignorant position has caused followers to be infected with HIV. It contributed to the infections big time."

The sentiment was echoed today by AIDS activists in South Africa. Caroline Nenguke, a spokeswoman for the Treatment Action Campaign, said: "Historically the Catholic Church has been in denial with regard to condom use. For the pope to say they can be used in certain circumstances is a step in the right direction."

The Asahi Shimbun theguardian TheObserver Le Monde

— International Briefs —

Kids Safer in Kabul Than in London, NATO Rep Says

LONDON - Kids are safer in Kabul than they are in London or Glasgow, despite the danger of unexploded bombs in the Afghan capital, according to NATO's leading civilian representative there. Mark Sedwill said Kabul was also safer for children than New York. "In Kabul and the other big cities [in Afghanistan] actually there are very few of those bombs," he told CBBC's Newsround. "The children are probably safer here than they would be in London, New York or Glasgow or many other cities," he added. "Most children can go about their lives in safety. It's a very family-orientated society. So it is a little bit like a city of villages." Sohrad, a 16-year-old student, told Newsround: "Because of explosions happening in the city, it is frightening when we come to school. We are afraid of explosions in the school." Justin Forsyth, chief executive of Save the Children, said it was "wrong and misleading" to say children in Kabul were safer than those living in the First World. "Afghanistan is the worst place on earth to be born a child—one in four children living there will die before they reach the age of 5," he said. *(Guardian)*

Columbine Massacre May Be Linked to Sisters' Suicide

NEW YORK - Detectives seeking a motive behind the apparent suicide pact of Australian twin sisters who shot themselves at a firing range in Colorado believe it may be linked to the 1999 Columbine school massacre. Police found the cover of Time magazine from May 1999, among the possessions of the sisters. The cover was headlined "The Monsters Next Door: What Made Them Do It," and featured the two Columbine gunmen and their 13 victims. Kristin and Candice Hermeler, aged 29, shot each other on Nov 16 at the shooting range near Columbine school. Candice received a head wound and is still in hospital, while Kristin died. Police revealed Kristin wrote letters to Brooks Brown, one of the survivors of the Columbine tragedy, thanking him for having been a friend to Eric Harris, one of the gunmen. The letter was written in June 1999, just two months after the Columbine shootings, suggesting that Kristin had been interested in the massacre when it happened. The sisters were described by friends as likeable and well educated, with no apparent difficulties. They had been traveling in the US for three months. *(Guardian)*

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Iranian Man Deported From UK Claims Torture by Iraqi Police

BY OWEN BOWCOTT
THE GUARDIAN

LONDON - An Iranian national who was mistakenly deported to Baghdad from the UK claims that he endured constant beatings and starvation at the hands of Iraqi police officers.

The alleged mistreatment of Aland Salimi, 21, has emerged as the European Court of Human Rights this week considers whether it is safe to resume deporting failed Iraqi asylum seekers to the dangerous Iraqi capital. Deportations to Baghdad by the UK Border Agency have in effect been suspended until Nov 24, because of an upsurge in violence and dramatic recent attacks on Christian churches. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has also raised serious concerns about the conditions under which unsuccessful asylum seekers in foreign countries are then forcibly returned to the Middle East.

The case of Salimi, an Iranian Kurd who first came to Britain in 2007, illustrates the difficulties facing the UK immigration services. The UKBA says that Salimi described himself as Iraqi during his application for asylum in the UK, in the hope of strengthening his chances of being accepted. When Salimi was rejected and moves began to deport him to Baghdad, he started protesting instead that he was an Iranian, said the UKBA.

A letter was at this time written to the UK immigration minister, Damian Green, pointing out what was Salimi's real nationality, but the fact that he had been through a screening interview by Iraqi officials in the UK and accepted by these officials to be an Iraqi national may have sealed his fate. On Sept 6, he was put on a flight out of the UK with about 60 other failed asylum seekers.

"When we arrived at Baghdad airport, the Kurdish people did not want to be taken off the plane," Salimi said. "The Iraqi police came on and shouted. They beat us with sticks. I told them I was Iranian. They didn't listen to me….The Iraqi police took me in a car to a prison, and they started beating me again.

"They didn't give me food, and they took the money in my pockets. I had no food or water for over 24 hours. They said that Kurdish people 'make problems' and they would send me to Iran where Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would kill me. They were laughing. They also swore at me, shouted and threatened to hang me. They were Shiite officers, while I'm Kurdish and a Sunni Muslim."

Salimi's solicitor in Cardiff, Sara Changkee, took a more detailed statement through a translator.

"Aland says that when the Iraqi immigration officials came on to the plane, he had squashed himself down [below the seats]," she said. "But they beat him with large wooden sticks and he became unconscious. He was taken to prison and beaten every day. Food and fluids were withheld. Somewhere along the line, the British Embassy in Baghdad became involved." It was then arranged to have Salimi flown back to the UK.

Dashty Jamal, a representative of the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees, said the case showed that it was not safe to return failed asylum seekers to Baghdad. "European governments want to send people back to a war zone," he said.

The Iraqi Embassy in London did not at this time respond to inquiries about the Salimi case. The Foreign Office, which returned Salimi to the UK, said in a letter to the European court that he had described his experience in Baghdad as "torture." A second man, who was also wrongly deported to Iraq on Sept 6 and flown back to Britain at the same time, is thought to have been a Palestinian national.

When asked why Salimi had been wrongly deported to Iraq, Matthew Coats, the head of immigration at the UKBA, said on the matter: "No documentary evidence has been submitted to the UK Border Agency to support his claim to be an Iranian national and an Iraqi ID card was submitted with his original claim.

"Only at the point of his detention in order to facilitate his removal from the United Kingdom did [Salimi] claim to be an Iranian national. He had asserted from his first encounter with the UK Border Agency that he was Kurdish and originated from the Dukan area of Sulaymania in northern Iraq. He maintained his claim to be an Iraqi national throughout the appeal process, most recently at an appeal hearing before an immigration judge earlier this year, which was then dismissed."

The Asahi Shimbun theguardian TheObserver Le Monde

Diplomacy Between Japan and South Korea May Not Be Easy

BY YOSHIHIRO MAKINO AND HIROTAKA YAMAGUCHI
THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

TOKYO - The shuttle diplomacy effort about to resume between Japan and South Korea will not be without its challenges.

A Japanese government source said Friday that South Korean President Lee Myung-bak is planned to make a state visit to Japan in December.

Hurdles still remain, however, over the timing of the handover of important Korean cultural artifacts, and a bilateral economic partnership agreement between the two Asian giants.

Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan first requested Lee visit this year when they met in Yokohama, Japan, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum on Nov 14.

The two leaders also signed an accord for the handover of historic Korean documents and other artifacts, which were seized by Japan during its colonial rule of Korea from 1910 to 1945.

Seoul hopes that the contested items will be returned during Lee's next state visit to Japan. The Japanese Kan administration is in agreement with this, hoping that the "transfer" will signal an amicable conclusion to the controversial 2010 centenary marking Japan's historical annexation of the Korean Peninsula.

But the accord requires Japanese Diet approval, which an official Foreign Ministry source said "will be tough" before the current session ends Dec 3, given the difficulty that the current administration faces in the twisted Diet.

A South Korean government source also confided that a Lee visit to Japan by the end of the year "has not been agreed to 100 percent."

During his visit, Lee is also expected to discuss the resumption of talks to conclude a bilateral economic partnership agreement. The talks have been suspended since November 2004 over farm trade and other differences of opinion between the two Asian nations.

The Kan Cabinet on Nov 9 approved a basic policy for pushing comprehensive economic partnerships between the two. The Cabinet also stressed bilateral deals, including one planned with South Korea.

But stiff opposition exists within the ruling Democratic Party of Japan over specific sectors, such as the liberalization of agriculture and removing nontariff barriers.

Reuters

Japan's Prime Minister Naoto Kan, left, and South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak look at documents written about the Korean Empire after a ceremony on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in Japan.

Seoul is also cautious about a proposed bilateral deal regarding defense information. Officials in Seoul are concerned that such a bilateral deal could have the potential to upset China.

These concerns may complicate Kan's diplomatic strategy with South Korea, the only field in which the DPJ administration has scored any points amid a series of setbacks in its ongoing relations with the US, China and Russia.

After the shuttle diplomacy resumes, Kan plans to visit South Korea early next year, as well as invite Lee to Japan again as a state guest next spring, according to media sources.

If realized, the leaders will likely issue a joint declaration, with a bilateral economic partnership agreement and security cooperation as the key pillars.

The DPJ government has been in favor of a state visit by Lee since last year. Seoul remained reticent in part due to the centenary of Japan's annexation of the Korean Peninsula, and the trouble that continually hurt Kan's predecessor, former Japanese prime minister Yukio Hatoyama.

Kan offered a formal apology over Japan's past colonial rule of Korea last summer, and announced the impending transfer of cultural assets, paving the way for the shuttle diplomacy efforts.

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Clues Given to Mysterious 'Kryptos' Sculpture on CIA Grounds

BY ED PILKINGTON
THE GUARDIAN

NEW YORK - Some of the best brains in international code-breaking, including cryptographers in the US Central Intelligence Agency and the US National Security Agency, as well as thousands of amateur sleuths worldwide, have been given some fresh hope that they may yet crack one of the world's toughest logic puzzles, which has thus far remained unsolved for over 20 years.

The engimatic riddle is embedded in a work of art that stands just outside the main entrance to the US CIA's headquarters in the state of Virginia. The artist who designed the 1990 sculpture, Jim Sanborn, has now become so frustrated by the failure of the code-breaking community to crack his puzzle that he has dangled a six-letter clue in front of them.

The clue offers the hope that a problem that has eluded the finest thinkers in the intelligence community, as well as their high-powered computers, may now finally be solved. The riddle has inspired many websites and user groups and was even a theme of Dan Brown's novel, "The Lost Symbol."

Sanborn's "Kryptos" sculpture was commissioned to mark the extension of the agency's headquarters in Langley, and the work's name was itself a play on the intelligence function of the agency: the sculpture's name, "Kryptos," translates into "hidden" in Greek.

Sanborn, who was awarded the $250,000 commission to design the work in a competition, embedded four puzzles in the curved copper panels of the large sculpture. Sanborn spent four months devising the codes, with the assistance of a retired CIA cryptographer.

Three of the four puzzles were solved in the first few years by a CIA physicist who cracked the code using just pen and paper. More were deciphered by a California-based IT specialist using a computer.

The first deciphered sequence was a poetic phrase composed by Sanborn; the second referred to an object that could be buried in the grounds of Langley and to the CIA expert with whom Sanborn shared the secret to all four sequences; and the third was a passage from Howard Carter's historical account of opening the sealed tomb of the Pharoah Tutankhamun in Egypt in 1922.

The fourth and final code of "Kryptos" involves 97 of the 869 characters carved into the main portion of the sculpture. Sanborn has now revealed, through the New York Times, a six-letter element of those 97 hidden letters.

Sanborn has also disclosed that the part of the sculpture that reads "nypvtt" becomes "Berlin" once decoded. Sanborn says that so far only two of the 97 characters have been deciphered.

He told the New York Times newspaper that he had become so fed up with "Kryptos" obsessives contacting him to claim success that he has set up his own website to filter out such approaches.

Correspondents will only be given access to Sanborn's website if they can show that they have decoded the first 10 letters of the 97-letter puzzle.

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Efforts to Double Wild Tiger Populations Discussed in Forum

By Jonathan Watts
THE GUARDIAN

ST PETERSBURG, Russia - A campaign to double the number of tigers in the wild by 2022 was on the agenda yesterday at the highest level political meeting to ever discuss a single species.

The International Tiger Forum in St Petersburg, Russia, is being staged in response to a calamitous 97 percent decline in tigers in the wild over a century.

The Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin, and the president of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, were behind the four-day event, during which it is hoped that $350 million will be secured for tiger conservation.

The forum—which is taking place during the international year of biodiversity and the Chinese year of the tiger—will also include the unveiling of an international consortium to combat wildlife crime, and pledges to tighten protection by the 13 countries where tigers live.

There are appeals expected from celebrities, including the actor Leonardo DiCaprio and the model Naomi Campbell.

The unprecedented mobilization of political, financial and celebrity power was welcomed by conservation groups, but there were concerns that it may prove too little too late unless the words are translated into actions.

Jim Leape, director general of WWF, said that 40 years of conservation efforts had failed to halt poaching, loss of habitat and the decline of prey species. As a result, several subspecies have already died out, the wild population has shrunk to just 3,200 tigers, and the number continues to shrink every day.

"The reasons for this disaster are well known," Leape said. "Unless we take drastic action, there will be no tigers by the next year of the tiger in 2022."

The crisis was described as far deeper than the loss of a single charismatic cat species. In an opening address, James Adams, the vice president of the World Bank, said that the demise of the tiger was symptomatic of a broader biological crisis that imperils economic growth.

"This forces us to rethink the development paradigm. The loss of a species at the top of the food chain endangers all the creatures below," said Adams. "Past failures have proven that piecemeal approaches don't work. Action must be comprehensive."

At the end of the summit, leaders are expected to adopt a global tiger recovery program, which includes a target of doubling tiger numbers by 2022, making core tiger areas inviolate, increasing public awareness of tiger conservation, setting up cross-boundary protected areas and cracking down on persistent poaching and smuggling.

Ministers and officials from Asian nations spelled out the actions they are taking to address the crisis.

India, which has the largest wild population, said it planned to establish eight new reserves, while Thailand promised to spend $98.6 million over five years to strengthen conservation and tackle illegal wildlife trade.

Russia pledged to crackdown on poachers and to work with China to set up a shared, cross-border protected area aimed at adding space for an extra 500 Amur tigers. Malaysia said it would increase its population, but it would need help with the expected cost of $1 million a tiger.

Donors are expected to emerge in the days ahead: the World Bank website notes plans to raise $350 million over the next five years, while the US announced $400,000 in funds to help Russia protect the extremely rare Amur tiger subspecies.

"Things are promising. People are really getting behind the common agenda. The question now is when will the rubber hit the road," said John Robinson, the chief conservation officer of the Wildlife Conservation Society. "If we can't come together as a global community to save tigers then it's hard to imagine what we can do it for."

But without a reduction in demand for tiger products, conservationists warn that efforts to protect habitat and tigers could come to nothing.

A recent report by Traffic, which monitors wildlife trade, noted that body parts from more than 1,000 tigers had been seized in the last decade.

China remains the main destination for illegally imported bone, penis and hides. Tiger farms in China also continue to advertise "tonics" made from harvested parts. Wen Jiabao, the Chinese premier, is due to attend the final day of the summit. The country has pledged to crackdown on poaching, expand international cooperation and increase financial investment into conservation.

Jia Zhibang, the minister of the Chinese state forest administration, said that China had accepted a heavy economic sacrifice by banning all trade in tiger products in 1993.

International conservation groups urge China to strengthen its enforcement of wildlife conservation with more undercover investigations.

"It's not difficult to encounter the traders who are selling tiger skin and bone in China. It would be relatively easy to get intelligence on them," said Debbie Banks, who is the head of the China campaign for the Environmental Investigation Agency.

"For a wealthy nation like China that could spend $31 billion on the Olympics, ending the tiger trade is simple if they want to," she said.

UK Heroin Shortage May Threaten Lives, Say Health Experts

By Diane Taylor
THE GUARDIAN

LONDON - UK hospitals are treating a growing number of drug users who have overdosed on heroin mixed with other substances by dealers, because of a huge shortage of the opiate across the UK.

One of the most severe heroin "droughts" for five years has been reported in areas across the UK, including, London, Lancashire, Surrey, and in Stockton-on-Tees.

The shortage has been linked not to seizures of the drug by law enforcement agencies, but to a fungus that has blighted this year's poppy crop in Afghanistan, reducing it by half.

Users are overdosing on either adulterated heroin, or, in some cases, what has been found to be a combination of a powerful sedative, caffeine and paracetamol. Some have become unconscious very soon after injecting or smoking it, while others have reported vomiting, flu-like symptoms and amnesia, drug agencies say.

One of the most recent reports of overdoses and hospital admissions came last week from Hastings, where four users had overdosed even though they had only taken a small amount of what they thought was heroin.

Toxicologist Dr John Ramsey, head of the Tictac Communications drugs database at St George's medical school, London, said he had had about 50 recent requests to analyze adulterated heroin.

While sedatives of the type turning up in recent batches used to be found only in the occasional sample of heroin, there appeared to be much more of it around now, he said.

Gary Sutton, head of drugs at the charity Release, said: "There is a very significant heroin shortage across the UK at the moment. It has been going on for some time now, but the last two months have seen stockpiles exhausted."

He expressed concern that what was being sold as heroin at the moment appeared to be adulterated with a powerful sedative and mixed with a high percentage of bulking agents like talcum powder or paracetamol.

"If people use this intravenously, perhaps on top of alcohol and methadone [the prescribed substitute drug for heroin], it is extremely risky. We have had many reports of people overdosing. It's really important that accident and emergency departments understand that they may not be dealing with a 'normal' heroin overdose when people are brought in," he said.

"When the drought ends, prices will rise. Heroin tolerance will be reduced, so the risk of fatal overdose will be much higher."

Such is the alarm about the current situation that several drugs agencies committed to harm reduction held an urgent meeting last week to discuss setting up an online warning system about contaminated street drugs.

Neil Hunt, director of research at KCA, a nationwide community drug treatment service, said: "This 'heroin drought' appears to be serious and geographically widespread. Street heroin is in a complete and utter muddle at the moment, and users are collapsing unexpectedly. We need to standardize information about what is out there."

Among those commenting in online forums about the drought, one user said: "I've never known anything like it in 30 years."

REGIONAL

Temple Discovery Brings Thailand Abortion Issues to Fore

Debate over legality, morality reopens in nation where procedure is largely illegal

BY SETH MYDANS
THE NEW YORK TIMES

BANGKOK - A cleansing ceremony is being planned next weekend to appease the "wandering souls" of 2,000 fetuses discovered on the grounds of a Bangkok Buddhist temple and believed to have been sent there from illegal abortion clinics.

Since the fetuses' discovery, people have been placing milk, baby clothes and toys at the temple morgue, where monks performed a prayer for the dead last Friday.

For the past week, the Thai public has been grappling with the implications of an admission from one of the temple's undertakers that he had been secretly storing the fetuses in the vaults of the crematorium after the temple's furnace broke down. When he also began burying them in a pit, the overpowering stench drew complaints from neighbors and led to the discovery of the fetuses.

Under Thai law, only abortions of pregnancies that result from incest or rape or endanger the lives of the mothers are legal. The events have reopened a debate in Thailand over the legality and morality of abortion. On Saturday, Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said, "Long-standing social values must be corrected."

The undertaker and a woman who acknowledged that she had delivered the fetuses to the temple declared that they had done no wrong.

An official of the Buddhist hierarchy here said temple ceremonies were in effect ceremonies of mourning.

"We have to look at its purpose: to show compassion for the souls of the aborted fetuses and lead them to rest in peace," said Amnart Buasiri, director of the Secretariat of the Sangha Supreme Council. "It is considered the same as the mass mourning for tsunami victims."

Two undertakers, Suchart Phonmee, 38, and Suthep Chabangbon, 56, have been charged with crimes related to the concealing of the fetuses. They said they had had no choice but to store them because they did not want to dispose of them like rubbish.

"Actually," Suchart said, "this condemnation should go to both the parents of the aborted babies and the ones who performed the abortions."

Lanchakorn Janthamanas, 33, has acknowledged that she made regular deliveries of fetuses to the temple after collecting them from several illegal clinics. She has also acknowledged having performed illegal abortions.

But her mother said it was not such a simple matter to place blame. "I am proud of my daughter for her contribution to society," said the mother, Sombat Sinotho, 60, speaking of the abortions she had performed. "Only those who have not faced the problem of an unwanted pregnancy tend to view her as evil."

Lanchakorn said she had rescued eight fetuses that had survived the procedure and was now raising them as her own adopted children. "I commit sin every day," she said, "so if the kids won't die, there's no need to kill them."

Her mother said she had only learned from newspaper accounts that they were the survivors of abortions.

Abhisit said that the current laws were "flexible enough" and that the problem ran deeper than legislation.

"The problem lies in society's values which require study and fostering appropriate values among at-risk groups," he said.

The penalty for performing an illegal abortion is as many as five years in prison and a fine of up to 10,000 baht, or about $330. The penalty increases if the abortion injures the pregnant woman.

But the penalties may be higher in the spiritual realm.

"In Buddhist view, both having an abortion and performing an abortion amount to murder," said Phramaha Vudhijaya Vajiramedhi, a leading monk who was quoted on Saturday in Post Today, a Thai-language newspaper. "It is a serious sin." He added: "Those involved in abortions will face distress in both this life and the next because their sins will follow them."

Commenting this month, before the stored fetuses were discovered, another famous monk, Pra Payom Kallayano, said the cleansing ritual has nothing to do with Buddhism.

"The people who organize this ritual often make money from it," he said. "Women are sensitive, gullible and easily embrace mistaken beliefs."

People should not believe they can remove their sins simply by performing a ritual, he said. "We should do good things," he said. "Those who do good gain good karma. We should believe in the rule of karma, not the ritual."

Indonesia's Private Universities Receive Mixed Report Card

BY LIZ GOOCH
THE NEW YORK TIMES

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia - Motorbikes deliver students—some with helmets over their head scarves, others with laptops slung across their shoulders—down the wide, tree-lined boulevard, past the mosque's gold dome, around a fenced-off excavation site where a ninth-century Hindu temple was uncovered this year, and onto the campus of the Islamic University of Indonesia.

It is the oldest private university in the country, and its alumni include national leaders of business and law. It was established by political figures in 1947 in Jakarta before being moved to Yogyakarta, the city in central Java known as the hub of Indonesia's higher education sector.

Thousands more private institutions have followed, creating a burgeoning private sector that is credited with improving access to college education in the country with more Muslims than any other.

In 1945, about 2,000 students were enrolled in higher education institutions in Indonesia, according to data analysis by the World Bank. Today, there are about 4 million higher education students, with 68 percent enrolled in one of the more than 3,000 private institutions in the country. There are about 130 public institutions.

While private universities have opened the doors of academia to many Indonesians who may otherwise have missed out, researchers say the quality of education provided by private universities, many of which were established in the 1980s, varies greatly.

While the Islamic University of Indonesia, for instance, is ranked among the country's top education institutions, other private institutions lack such a favorable reputation and are still considered a second choice behind public universities, said Mohamad Fahmi, an academic at Padjadjaran University in Bandung who has researched the sector.

Some private universities have poor facilities, while others lack qualified lecturers, he said. "There is an assumption that public is still better than private."

Fahmi said public universities continued to attract the brightest students, with the exception of a small group of private institutions with reputations in specific fields, like architecture. He said that while it was still difficult to gain entry to public universities, entry requirements at many of the "second-grade" private universities were more lenient.

The enrollment rates for Indonesians aged 18 to 22 increased to 26.6 percent in 2008 from 14.9 percent in 2001, but Fahmi said it remained "very hard for poor students to get into either public or private" institutions, despite the requirement that public universities reserve places for them.

He said he hoped that improving the private sector would help it attract wealthier students, freeing up more places for poorer students at public universities.

The World Bank says strengthening public support for private institutions will be vital to upgrading Indonesia's overall higher education system.

Dandan Chen, a senior economist in the bank's Jakarta office, said there was a need to review how to guide expansion of the private sector. She said some countries had found that having many small private institutions could be a "serious issue in terms of potential economies of scale and ability to offer good-quality education."

Some of these countries used rigorous accreditation programs to close some small private institutions that were substandard or to encourage mergers, she said.

In Indonesia, the government has its own plan to strengthen standards.

Indonesian universities will be required to obtain accreditation for their undergraduate programs by 2012, and those that fail to measure up will be closed or required to merge with accredited institutions, said Nizam, secretary of the Board of Higher Education, a national body of representatives from the sector that provides feedback to the government.

Nizam, an academic at Gadjah

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Universities...

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Mada University, said that there were also plans to compel universities to have their graduate programs accredited but that the immediate focus was on undergraduate degrees.

He said the accreditation process, which will also examine universities' internal quality assurance systems, would help lift standards.

Nizam said that for many years the government had paid the wages of some qualified lecturers who worked in private universities, where staff members often earned less than they could command in the public sector. He said this program, combined with the provision of scholarships to help staff members upgrade their qualifications, was helping private institutions address the shortage of qualified staff members, but he said the government could provide greater support in this area.

Meanwhile, the Islamic University of Indonesia represents the type of private institution academics would like to see replicated.

The university was 12th this year in government rankings, and last year it was accredited by the International Organization for Standardization, or ISO, the private body based in Geneva that promulgates global standards in many fields.

While fees at the Islamic University of Indonesia are higher than the average private university, the number of applicants increased to 12,000 this year from 8,500 in 2006, although the university accepted just 4,500 new students, said Edy Suandi Hamid, its rector.

The university has fewer than 20 international students, mostly from places like Australia, the Middle East and Thailand, but it is striving to increase international enrollment to 1 percent of all new students next year as part of its plans to become a "world class university."

Edy Suandi, chairman of the Cooperation Agency of Islamic Private Universities, said many of the university's students left their homes across Indonesia to come to Yogyakarta in search of a university with good facilities and qualified lecturers.

"I think the government should give more support to small higher education institutions, especially outside Java," he said. "That's why many of our students come from outside Java, because in their area they cannot find good universities."

Reuters

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim speaks to his assistants before leaving court in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Anwar, who is standing trial for alleged sodomy, has denied the charge, saying it is a repeat of a government conspiracy that saw him dismissed as deputy prime minister in 1998.

Thai Economy Slips Into Technical Recession

Sluggish exports, manufacturing output crimps third-quarter numbers

By Phisanu Phromchanya
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

BANGKOK - Slowing exports and lower manufacturing and agricultral output saw Thailand slip into a technical recession in the third quarter, data released yesterday showed.

The data didn't cause too much alarm, however, as the contraction was negligible while exports and domestic demand continue to perform well. But the slowing growth data will likely encourage the Bank of Thailand to stand pat on rates at its Dec 1 policy meeting.

Gross domestic product shrank a seasonally adjusted 0.2 percent during the July to September period from the second quarter, said Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, secretary-general of the National Economic and Social Development Board, the government's economic planning agency.

The third-quarter figure marks two straight quarters of contraction, the definition of a recession, after the agency revised down second-quarter GDP data to a contraction of 0.6 percent on quarter from a previous estimate for 0.2 percent growth. The agency raised on-year growth in the second quarter to 9.2 percent, from 9.1 percent.

In the third quarter, GDP rose 6.7 percent from a year earlier. During the January-September period, the economy expanded 9.3 percent, the agency said.

Nine economists polled by Dow Jones Newswires estimated a median forecast of a 0.7 percent on-quarter contraction in GDP in the third quarter. On year, 13 economists projected the economy to have expanded 7 percent.

Exports, a key growth driver in Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, continued to expand during the third quarter, albeit at a sharply slower pace than earlier this year, when shipments surged as pockets of the global economy showed signs of picking up and inventory restocking was ramped up. Domestic demand is also continuing to improve.

Despite two consecutive on-quarter falls in GDP, "I don't think we're anywhere near a recession. The marginal contractions are considered negligible, as they are simply the result of massive inventory pileup earlier this year," said Pornthep Jubandhu, Siam Commercial Bank's manager of macroeconomic analysis.

Robust economic expansion in the first nine months of the year prompted the agency to revise up its full-year GDP forecast to 7.9 percent, from a previous expectation of 7 percent to 7.5 percent. The upward revision has factored in the adverse effect from Thailand's worst floods in decades, which are expected to have eaten into GDP by 0.3 percentage points.

Arkhom said the fourth quarter will be weighed by the floods' impact but that strong seasonal export growth and higher agricultural product prices may offset the adverse effect and could even drive growth, both on year and on quarter, into positive territory.

While the Thai baht has appreciated rapidly against the dollar, rising about 11 percent this year to 13-year highs, authorities have repeatedly stressed that the impact on the overall economy is negligible. At the same time, exporters have so far managed to adjust.

The NESDB assumed in its latest forecasts that the dollar will average 29 baht to 30 baht next year, Arkhom said.

Meanwhile, he said he also expects the central bank to maintain its key policy rate at 1.75 percent throughout 2011, as a low rate is still needed to accommodate economic growth.

"With the economy edging into a technical recession, we now firmly believe the possibility of a rate hike at the Dec 1 policy meeting has been eliminated," Barclays Capital economist Rahul Bajoria wrote in a note.

NATIONAL

Briefing

Boat Racers Smuggled 20 Tons of Wood, Police Say

Kompong Thom provincial police said yesterday they had seized a total of 20 tons of luxury wood and 60 cubic meters of first-grade timber last week from 10 trucks carrying boat racers to Phnom Penh for the Water Festival. Forestry officials said on Sunday they had confiscated the wood on a convoy of boat racers coming from Prasat Sambo district, but they had been unable to specify the quantity of wood seized. Yesterday, Phan Sopheng, Kompong Thom provincial police chief, provided more details. "We confiscated approximately 60 cubic meters of first-class wood and 20,000 kg of Kra Nuung" luxury wood, he said, adding that off-duty police officers that were on the boat-racing teams had tipped off police about the illegal haul. "We have some clues about the perpetrators," he said, but he denied that the boat racers were responsible for smuggling the wood. Mr Sopheng said he believed the luxury wood was probably logged in Siem Reap, Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey provinces. Kompong Thom Provincial Court prosecutor Pen Sarath and Kompong Thom Provincial Forestry Cantonment chief Sim Labaing declined yesterday to comment on the case. *(Neou Vannarin)*

SRP Activist Says P Veng Court Summoned Him

SRP activist Oun Sam Oeun, 29, said yesterday that a Prey Veng prosecutor had summoned him to appear on Friday for questioning over a 2009 land dispute. Mr Sam Oeun said he had received a summons on Nov 19 for the second time over allegations that he had defamed Ba Phnom district's Sdao Korng commune authorities by accusing them of appropriating villagers' land for road construction. "I will not appear in court following the summons because I do not have a lawyer [and] I am afraid I will be arrested," he said, noting that the Nov 16 summons from prosecutor Say Nora said an arrest warrant would be issued if he failed to appear. Mr Sam Oeun said that since July he had sought delays for health reasons. However, Sdao Korng commune chief Hem Hon, who could not be reached yesterday, said in August that villagers voluntarily agreed to give up 3 meters of land, which was taken. Mr Nora, the prosecutor, could not be reached. *(Eang Mengleng)*

Norodom Ranariddh Party Returns Sans Prince

By Neou Vannarin
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Prince Norodom Ranariddh agreed yesterday to allow his name to be used once again by the Nationalist Party, formerly known as the Norodom Ranariddh Party, but stopped short of announcing a return to politics, the party and a spokesman for the prince said yesterday.

During a meeting with roughly 60 Nationalist Party members in Phnom Penh yesterday, party president Chhim Seakleng formally asked Prince Ranariddh to return to the party as its leader, and to allow it to bear his name once again, according to party spokesman Pen Sangha.

"His Highness agreed to one of the two requests," Mr Sangha said. "His Highness agreed to the...request to use his name for the party."

Prince Ranariddh has still not responded to the request that he return to politics, Mr Sangha said, adding that the party's name would be formally changed by mid-December.

Prince Ranariddh's spokesman, Chea Chanboribo, confirmed yesterday that the prince would once again lend his name to the party but said he had not agreed to reenter the political fray.

In an April interview, Prince Ranariddh said he had no immediate plans to return to politics but might reconsider if he were faced with popular demand for his return.

"Politics is a very addictive thing, more addictive than drinking wine," he told a group of followers in Kompong Chhnang province that month. "When they barred me from politics for a long time, I felt unwell."

The prince announced his retirement from political life in October 2008, ending a tumultuous political career that spanned some 15 years. After his removal as Funcinpec president in 2006, the prince formed the Norodom Ranariddh Party, which won just two National Assembly seats the 2008 elections and changed its name to the Nationalist Party in 2009.

Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphan said yesterday that members of the Royal Family should avoid politics.

"The changing of the party's name is the right of the political party," he said. "His Highness [Prince Ranariddh] is royalty, so he should help the King in his duties to work in charity and strengthen national sovereignty rather than participating in politics."

Prince Ranariddh did not immediately reply to an e-mailed request for comment yesterday.

Festival Concludes With Ceremony for Rowers

By Chhorn Chansy and Andrew Burmon
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

King Norodom Sihamoni, Prime Minister Hun Sen and National Assembly President Heng Samrin yesterday presided over a ceremony concluding the Water Festival and honoring the champions of this year's boat races.

According to government officials, no serious crimes were reported during this year's festivities, despite higher attendance and a higher number of boats competing in the races. King Sihamoni awarded trophies to the representatives of nine undefeated rowing teams and met the cheers of the rowers floating past his pavilion with bows and waves.

"We are very happy because this is a great honor for our homeland," said Bin Seng, a 42-year-old rower whose 22-man boat from Kompong Speu province edged out a team from Kompong Chhnang province for first place in its category.

As Mr Seng and his fellow rowers waited to be presented with their trophy, Pum Bunchanoath, an assistant at the government's events planning committee, showed them and other team representatives how to appropriately bow to the King.

"I am very happy we came in first and will get the trophy from the King," said Rath Vutha, a 21-year-old rower on the 70-man boat from Kompong Cham province that logged this year's best time. "Last year, we came in second, and this is much better."

Pong Savrith, deputy Phnom Penh military police commander, said yesterday that no one was badly hurt as racing boats capsized.

"Eighteen boats capsized, but no one died and no serious injuries," said Mr Savrith.

Mr Savrith said that the most important case facing his officers was the disappearance of a child visiting Phnom Penh for the festival, but he declined to give details.

Municipal penal police chief Chuon Narin said that though police had not yet finalized their reports for the festival, crime appeared to have decreased since last year.

"There have only been minor crimes like bag and necklace snatching, because we cracked down," said Mr Narin.

Mr Narin said that, though traffic in Phnom Penh was chaotic during the festival, it seemed to have improved marginally because large trucks were ordered to bypass the city.

UN Official Questions Necessity of NGO Law

By Clancy McGilligan and Phorn Bopha
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The head of the UN human rights office in Phnom Penh has questioned the need for proposed legislation regulating NGOs while also expressing hope for an "effective consultation" on the draft law.

A public workshop on the long-awaited draft law could be held before the end of the year, according to a government official. Copies of the draft would be handed out to NGOs one or two weeks beforehand, according to the official, although NGOs have requested at least a month.

"Our legal view, based on human rights standards, is that the current legal framework—civil law, penal law, law on counter-terrorism, anticorruption law—is sufficient to regulate all aspects of nongovernmental organizations and associations: from registration, to legal personality, to criminal responsibility, to financial transparency and control," Christophe Peschoux, country representative for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, wrote in an e-mail on Friday.

"We are thus questioning the legal necessity of an additional law. In terms of priority, our advice is that the adoption [of] remaining fundamental laws relating to the organization of the judiciary would go a long way to strengthen the framework for the administration of justice," Mr Peschoux wrote. "Of course, it is the prerogative of any elected government to decide its own legislative agenda."

These views have already been shared with the government, NGOs and donors, Mr Peschoux said.

Government officials have said a law on NGOs is necessary because the civil society sector lacks accountability and transparency, while NGOs have expressed concerns that such a law could compromise their independence.

Lieutenant General Khieu Sopheak, spokesman for the Ministry of Interior, said yesterday that "some NGOs don't want this law because they have to be under it."

NATIONAL

Briefing

Lao Man Arrested With More Than 3,500 Pills

A Lao man was arrested with 3,520 amphetamine pills allegedly in his possession in Stung Treng province's Thala Barivat district on Sunday, police said yesterday. Ngong Thong, 52, was arrested at 5:30 pm in Preah Romkil commune, said Nou Hour, chief of Stung Treng province's anti-drug police. "We have been watching him for around a week, since he crossed the border," Mr Hour said, adding that Mr Thong was arrested at a house in Anlong Svay village. Mr Hour said a provincial prosecutor oversaw police yesterday as they counted the number of pills allegedly found in Mr Thong's possession. He added that police would seek drug smuggling charges when Mr Thong was sent to appear in court today. "It is the second time a Lao citizen has been arrested so far this year by our anti-drug policemen," he said. Stung Treng provincial police chief Long Vichet alleged yesterday that Mr Thong had smuggled the pills into Cambodia by hiding them in sticky rice. *(Saing Soenthrith)*

HIV Testing Campaign Starts With Water Festival

AIDS Healthcare Foundation on Friday kicked off this year's "Testing Millions" international campaign, which is set to run until World AIDS Day on Dec 1, organizers said. Nearly 3,000 people were tested and nine people were found to be HIV-positive at five Phnom Penh locations over three and a half days, said Chan Phanna, technical support and training manager for AHF. "Now we will proceed to test in the provinces," Mr Phanna said, noting that last year 4,662 people were tested and 183 people were found HIV-positive in Phnom Penh. Nationwide, 530 positive results came back from more than 13,500 tests by AHF and partners last year, according to the website for the campaign, which tested more than 4 million people worldwide in 2009. Chhim Sarath, AHF country program manager, said those who test positive are offered counseling and referrals for treatment. "It is a good opportunity, because a lot of people come to Phnom Penh, so we can meet everyone from everywhere," he said. *(Khy Sovuthy and Alice Foster)*

Rural Roads Driving Away From Anonymity

By Phann Ana
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The anonymity of Cambodia's sprawling network of rural roads is set to become a thing of the past, with the government confirming last week that it was in the early stages of listing identifying numbers for more than 30,000 km of roads nationwide.

A Sept 13 proclamation signed by Rural Development Minister Chea Sophara stated that every department of the Ministry of Rural Development, provincial officials, NGOs and development partners "shall use the number of a rural road to identify the road in every official document."

The proclamation said six-digit numbers would be used to identify roads, with the first two digits referencing the province, the second two referencing the district and the last two referencing the road number.

Yoeun Sophal, director of the Rural Development Ministry's rural roads department, said last week that 33,005 km of roads nationwide had been identified as being in need of numbering.

Mr Sophal said a two-year road numbering project, to be carried out between 2011 and 2013, would help provide officials with a more accurate picture of Cambodia's rural road network, therefore enabling authorities to allocate appropriate funding for road maintenance and upgrades.

"Without making the road numbers clear, problems managing the roads can occur between the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation and the Ministry of Rural Development," Mr Sophal said.

"Numbering the roads would help to build transparency in who is responsible for maintaining or repairing the roads."

Even more important, he said, was that the road number would double as a postal code, making it easier for the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications to carry out its work in rural areas away from provincial centers. Improvements to roads identified during the road-numbering project would also assist postal officers, he added.

Theng Chan Sangva, chief of Rural Development Minister Chea Sophara's Cabinet, said last week that the project was proving difficult for officials attempting to locate all of Cambodia's rural roads.

Mr Chan Sangva said officials were still some way off from finalizing how many rural roads would be part of the project.

"We are working on this now, and it is not easy compiling the number. There are too many roads," he said.

Yorn Sarom, director of Mondolkiri province's rural development department, said last week that even though his province had few identifiable roads, he expected the new project would help to improve the links between far-flung villages.

"It will help people to direct between one village and another village, and then between a commune and another," Mr Sarom said.

R'kiri Court Dismisses Rights Worker Complaint

By Kuch Naren
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

A prosecutor in Ratanakkiri province has dismissed a 2007 complaint filed by a rights worker alleging that two Banlung City deputy police chiefs illegally raided the worker's home while he was at a protest, police said.

Adhoc provincial investigator Chhay Thy, 42, lodged a complaint in December 2007, accusing Banlung deputy police chiefs Puth Savy and Ma Buntung of searching his home in Laban Siek commune while he was at a march against land grabs and deforestation.

"The court decision to dismiss the complaint has nothing to do with the defendants' positions as police officers," commune police chief Nuon Sarith said yesterday, adding that he had delivered the letter in person. "Police were briefly informed by court officials that there was no strong evidence to support [Mr Thy's] allegation. That is why the court decided to dismiss."

Mr Buntung denied any wrongdoing when reached by telephone yesterday.

"The court decision is right and is based on the fact that I have done nothing wrong," Mr Buntung said. "On the day of the incident, I was just dropping by [Mr Thy's] home to ask for a glass of water to drink."

Mr Thy said he had been interviewed in July by deputy prosecutor Ros Saram, who could not be reached yesterday. Mr Thy claimed that complaints like his were often dismissed at the provincial court, and said he had little faith in the courts, but would appeal.

"It's common that any complaint alleging that forces were involved in an illegal housing raid or land grab crimes...or deforestation for land encroachment is dismissed by the court," he said.

The letter sent to Mr Thy did not give a reason for the prosecutor's dismissal of his three-year-old complaint, according to a copy.

"You have the right to appeal related to this decision-making letter beginning from the day you receive this letter," the copy said.

Mine Chemical Waste Damages Crops in K Cham

By Van Roeun
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

More than 30 families in Kompong Cham province's Memot district claim that toxic waste from a gold mine in the area has polluted an irrigation canal used for watering rice fields.

Villagers said yesterday that a wealthy miner from Suong City, whom they identified as Meng, had mined in the area until recently, causing chemicals to run into the canal system, a claim provincial authorities denied.

"We want the miner to remove the waste from the canal because it has affected our rice fields," said Troeng Lavy, a farmer in Choam Tamao commune. He said that a huge pile of chemical waste about 60 square meters in size had started flowing into the irrigation system during the rainy season.

Im Yoth, another farmer, said he had been forced to abandon about a third of his 1.5-hectare plot because toxic chemicals had flowed into the water supply.

Huong Sothea, provincial monitor for rights group Adhoc, said that chemical waste had affected about 36 hectares of farmland and claimed that provincial authorities had asked an unnamed miner to stop operations in September after villagers complained about the chemical waste.

But Suon Dy, director of the provincial department of industry, mines and energy, said yesterday that there had been no mining activities recently and blamed illegal operations conducted during the 1990s.

"It was old waste from the 1990s, when people anarchically mined for gold," he said.

A CHANCE TO JOIN THE CAMBODIA PEACE CORPS

We Have Many Men So We Are Now Encouraging Women to Apply

We have built over 403 primary and secondary schools all over Cambodia funded by donors with matching funds from the World and Asian Development Banks.

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Anyone joining our "Peace Corps" with a contract of at least one year will earn $180 a month which includes the salary, food, housing and transportation from Phnom Penh. Teachers close to Phnom Penh may commute on weekends to attend classes at universities. Our team will also have the opportunity to compete towards study scholarships, participate in training workshops, receive a prestigious certificate from our organization and, based on dedication and performance, a strong recommendation to future employers attesting our candidates honorably served their country and attesting to their skills.

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If you know English, have computer skills and are interested, please provide your cv and short essay outlining your interest in this program. Contact Sok Chamroeurn by e-mail to chamroeurn@cambodiadaily.com, fax to 023-218-635, or call 012-509-901.

Japan Relief for Cambodia/American Assistance for Cambodia
129, Street 228, Phnom Penh
Tel: 023-218-640, Fax: 023-218-635

The Women's International Group Presents

Christmas Fair 2010

Hotel InterContinental Phnom Penh

Sunday

November 28, 2010

10am - 5pm

- Featuring 70 vendors selling a variety of handicrafts, jewellery, books, toys, soft furnishings, house accessories, home-made produce and much more
- Chance to win fabulous raffle prizes, enjoy great music, local entertainment and refreshments!
- Wine, tea, jam, cheese and other tastings
- Fun entertainment for children including games, performing clowns and an opportunity to visit Santa!

Admission $3 (Free for children up to 12 years old)

Women's International Group of Cambodia

wigcambodia@yahoo.com

All proceeds go to projects that support vulnerable women and children in Cambodia.

Venue kindly donated free of charge by Hotel InterContinental Phnom Penh

Ministry of Health
The Office of the Principal Recipient for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Vacancy for Program Review for GFATM Grants (End Term Review Round 4 and Mid-Term Review Round 6)

The Principal Recipient of Ministry of Health has received funds from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, (GFATM) to further disburse to its Sub-Recipient for implementing the round 4 HIV/AIDS and Malaria, and round 6 Malaria grants.

The PR is now seeking an international consultant and a national consultant to conduct an end term of program review for round 4 HIV/AIDS and Malaria and a mid term review for round 6 Malaria. The term of reference (TOR) is available at PR/MoH office.

It is highly recommended that interested applicants shall obtain the full detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) of this assignment, before submission of their application. The full TOR can be requested from the PR office by fax/email or directly contact at the PR Office; detailed address is provided below. Applicants without prior knowledge of TOR will not be accepted.

Summary of qualifications:

- Masters Degree or equivalent related degrees will be considered and minimum of 5 years experience working on public health, proposal development, program implementation, management, and evaluation. Cambodia Health sector and Prior experience with GFATM is an asset.

Interested candidates shall submit their CV including a cover letter, on or before 30th November, 2010 to the Office of the PR (Attn: Dr. Sok Touch, Chairman of the PR) Ministry of Health (Room 201), #151-153 Kampuchea Krom Street, Phnom Penh.
CAMBODIA
Tel/Fax: **(855)023 427 236 or 723 832**
Email: **PR@moh.gov.kh** or **Adm_PR@moh.gov.kh**

Women are encouraged to apply

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interview

Applications close on 30th November, 2010 at 17.00hrs Cambodia time.

SILAKA

National Conference on Women in Cambodia (NCWC)
Research Consultant and Consultant Assistant to the Steering Committee
For the 3rd National Conference on Women in Cambodia

Deadline: 30th November 2010

SILAKA/CPWP in collaboration with a group of women NGOs are seeking a Research Consultant and Consultant Assistant to support the Steering Committee (SC) in organizing the 3rd National Conference on Women in Cambodia (NCWC).

The 3rd NCWC aims to establish a common framework for discussion to enhance the status of women in social, political and economy, for joint discussion between NGOs, Government and public sector in order to achieve better coordination for a sustainable development in Cambodia.

1. Short-Term Research Consultant

Location : Phnom Penh
Duration : 20 Days

Roles and responsibility of the consultant:

- Design the research methodology and framework to conduct the survey;
- Conduct a literature review
- Conduct a mapping exercise of key NGO and stakeholder projects, programs and activities;
- Coordinate 4-5 technical working team coming from partners NGOs to implement the research;
- Draft research questionnaires;
- Organize, coordinate, and carry out the data collection at provincial level workshops;
- Analyze key findings and develop recommendations for the SC.
- Present findings to the Steering Committee before presenting it at the National Consultation Workshop;
- Compile additional comments/recommendations from the workshop; and
- Finalize the report.

2. Short- term Consultant Assistant for organizing the 3rd NCWC

Location : Phnom Penh
Duration : 24 Days

Roles and responsibility of the consultant:

- Work with co-chair or secretary of NCWC to facilitate the SC in the process to organize the 3rd NCWC; Coordinate tasks during the conference ;
- Work closely with SC/sub-committees to raise fund for the NCWC,
- Draft and implement a work plan to organize the conference;
- Compile information and identify key issues for the SC to decide;
- Assist the SC in the organization to promote inclusiveness in the organizing the whole process;
- Develop evaluation form to evaluate the NCWC;
- Support the SC in preparation of the conference program ;
- Oversee the preparation and documentation of the conference and its outputs;
- Draft a preliminary conference report to partners and donors;
- Compile a final report and recommendations with added recommendations and observation;
- Propose follow-up activities plan after the conference to the SC.

Consultants are requested to submit CV with a cover letter to Ms. Vary Khus, Administrative Supervisor or E-mail to **vary_khus@silaka.org** no later than 30th November 2010.
Detailed Term of References (ToRs)
are available at SILAKA website **www.silaka.org** and SILAKA office: #6S, street 21, Sangkat Tonle Bassac, Khan Chamkarmon, Phnom Penh, Camboida. Tel: 023 217 872/210 902.

Publicity Pushes Up Kampot Pepper Exports

By Simon Marks and Hul Reaksmey
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Exports of Cambodia's famed Kampot pepper have doubled this year despite a poor start to the rainy season as demand soared due to an increase in the product's publicity abroad.

Since the harvest season came to an end in May, a total of 4 tons of pepper have been exported to buyers in Europe, the US and Australia, said Jerome Benezech, director at FarmLink in Cambodia, a company that helps create commercial ties between pepper farmers in Kampot and international markets.

"The export market like the domestic market have grown in terms of volume," said Mr Benezech.

The increase in exports, however, is unrelated to the government's decision in April to officially register Kampot pepper with a geographical indicator, linking the product to its precise region of origin, he said.

Rather, documentaries on French television channel M6 in October last year as well as on the BBC in March have helped to generate a rise in demand for the product.

Mr Benezech said a dry start to this year's rainy season coupled with farmers' limited growing capacity were the main reasons for this. Another factor affecting the industry's growth is a lack of private investment.

"It's a risky investment, so you have to find the right people," Mr Benezech said. "To find private investors is not easy."

With Cambodia's first export of Kampot pepper only coming in 2008, the pepper industry here is also in its infancy, making it difficult for investors to predict demand abroad, he added. There are also constraints regarding the lack of clear land titles on farmland.

Still, Ngoun Lay, president of the Kampot Pepper Farmer's Association, said total production would increase to about 14 tons this year, up from 10 tons last year.

FarmLink is also consolidating new linkages with buyers in Australia and the US.

Despite growing demand abroad and fiercer domestic competition, FarmLink has not decided to increase the price of pepper this year, with a kilogram still selling for $12.

Reuters

A volunteer makes bricks from recycled paper for the waste villa by French architects Yann Falquerho and Frederic Tabary in Nantes, France, yesterday. The waste villa is made entirely from 100 percent recycled urban waste and is a symbol of sustainable development and waste prevention.

Booths Multiply to Reach Visiting Populace

By Hul Reaksmey and Tim Sturrock
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

In addition to the races on the Tonle Sap river over the previous three days, another, larger and, in some ways more visible, competition took place in Phnom Penh parks.

The Water Festival may be the largest festival in the country, but for companies it offers an unprecedented opportunity for marketing to the whole country. Companies said yesterday that they had seen an increase in promotional booths in the past several years.

On a visit to the Phnom Penh riverside yesterday, it was nearly impossible to ignore the corridors of hundreds of booths replete with speakers emitting a cacophony of sales pitches about soaps, drinks, condoms, makeup, motorcycle parts, mobile telephones, fortified wines—just about everything.

"For most of the companies it's the really, really big time for the marketing to reach to the consumers from the provinces, to reach beyond the Phnom Penh people," said Chea Socheath, activations director for the marketing firm River Orchid Cambodia. Activation is the word used by marketing companies for the booths.

Though municipal officials could not be reached to assess the number of booths allowed in the city, Mr Socheath said he has seen an uptick in booths that once only reached Hun Sen Park, Wat Botum Park and the Night Market but in the past several years has extended to the front of NagaWorld and then this year stretched to the park in front of the National Museum and Koh Pich island.

He noted while the booths' sponsorships pay for concerts and other entertainment, the loudness of some booths began to intensify in the past few years and more controls were needed.

"Everybody's trying to buy a louder sound system and trying to be the loudest," he said.

Still some companies said the increase in booths has also spread the amount of money that visitors spend thin, and sales have decreased despite a recovering economy.

Nov Sam An, a stock manager for Duro Motorcycle, said he has seen a 10 to 20 percent drop in sales of tires that his company sells since last year.

Even so, he said, "people who come the provinces will remember our products."

Kira Tarnavskaya, head of marketing for the mobile telephone service provider Beeline, said many of the millions of Cambodians who visit from the provinces had scant access to television and the Water Festival was a must for telecommunications companies competing with each other.

She said the prominence of the booths is fueled by their effectiveness, and Beeline now has six booths this year.

"If there was no demand, what would be the reason to put them in place?" she said.

Suon Sokunthear, a sales manager at Revlon makeup's booths, acknowledged that her booth was playing music loudly.

"This loud music really disturbs some, but we definitely cannot go without this music because it attracts visitors," she said. "It's popular among some people."

Business

Lawmaker Poses Challenge to Stock Market Operator Takeover

By Rachel Pannett
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

CANBERRA, Australia - Independent lawmaker Bob Katter yesterday was expected to challenge a proposed $8.3 billion takeover of the country's largest stock-market operator by Singapore Exchange Ltd, signaling an escalation in the political backlash to the deal.

The conservative Queensland state lawmaker, who describes the takeover of ASX Ltd as "lunacy," said he will call on the lower house to "oppose any sale of the Australian Securities Exchange that would provide majority foreign ownership."

"No country has had a juggernaut out of control like Australia's with foreign ownership," Katter said in an interview yesterday, pointing to a slew of recent merger-and-acquisition activity in the mining, rail, dairy, sugar and wheat industries.

The ASX takeover, which could create Asia's fifth-largest market operator, is a controversial political subject in Australia, where some fear moving control of the exchange overseas will damage the national interest. Opposition to the deal in Parliament by smaller parties and independents such as Katter poses a problem for Prime Minister Julia Gillard's minority government, which needs their support to pass legislation.

Under Australian law, no single shareholder can own more than 15 percent of the ASX and any attempt to raise that threshold must be considered for 15 days in Parliament—where lawmakers could move to block the takeover.

Katter's resolution says the sale "would not merely involve the ASX as an asset but may hand over to a foreign corporation the regulatory function inherent in a stock exchange."

"The Australian operations of the merged group will continue to operate under Australian law and be regulated by Australian authorities," said Malcolm Starr, ASX's Executive General Manager for Regulatory and Public Policy. Starr denies that ASX has any regulatory power.

Katter argues that allowing the Singapore exchange to take over the ASX could deny Australians a key shareholder watchdog, given the exchange operator has responsibility for certain regulatory functions like suspending trading.

Auto Industry Fears Possible Rare Earth Squeeze From China

REUTERS

PARIS - Car industry experts foresee problems if exports of rare earth metals from China needed for car production are threatened, they said, as data showed 2010 Chinese imports could dry up.

Rare earth metals like neodymium are used in the powerful magnets in electric motors for cars. China produces 97 percent of the world's rare earth metals, which are also used in the production of other high-tech and defense products.

Rare earth mineral exports from China could dry up for the rest of the year, according to data cited by China's Ministry of Commerce.

Frost & Sullivan senior consultant Nicolas Meilhan said a shortage of rare earths could pose a problem, but the full effects would only start to be felt once electric vehicle sales increased. Rare earths are used in rechargeable batteries for electric and hybrid cars.

"I think it's a huge problem, because those metals are used for electric motors. Any car with an electric motor will use these rare earth metals," he added.

"It could be that we'll have some supply problems there, probably not in the next couple of years but if EVs start to represent a significant part of sales then maybe we'll have to find other countries with rare earth metals," Meilhan said.

If no other sources could be used, the car industry would find alternative substances, Meilhan said.

"Those materials are the most adapted to these technologies. Of course you'd be in a position to find some alternatives," he said, although performance could be affected.

Valeo Chief Executive Jacques Aschenbroich said earth supply could be a short-term problem, but new supply sources could emerge if the materials were not available from China.

"Every time you have a kind of a control or a very high increase in prices, some mines somewhere else than China will open up again, because then the price becomes more attractive," Aschenbroich said.

"I think it could be a short-term problem. I don't think there will be a lack of availability of products in the few years to come. I think that some additional sources of supply will come."

Booming China Buys, Burns Coal as Others Look Elsewhere

By Elisabeth Rosenthal
INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

BEIJING - Even as developed countries close or limit the construction of coal-fired power plants out of concern over pollution and climate-warming emissions, coal has found a rapidly expanding market elsewhere: Asia, particularly China.

At ports in Canada, Australia, Indonesia, Colombia and South Africa, ships are lining up to load coal for furnaces in China, which has evolved virtually overnight from a coal exporter to one of the world's leading purchasers.

The US now ships coal to China via Canada, but coal companies are scouting for new loading ports in Washington State. New mines are being planned for the Rockies and the Pacific Northwest. Indeed, some of the world's more environmentally progressive regions are nascent epicenters of the new coal export trade, creating political tensions between business and environmental goals.

Traditionally, coal is burned near where it is mined—particularly so-called thermal or steaming coal, used for heat and electricity. But in the last few years, long-distance international coal exports have been surging because of China's galloping economy, which now burns half of the 6 billion tons of coal used globally each year.

As a result, not only are the pollutants that developed countries have tried to reduce finding their way into the atmosphere anyway, but ships chugging halfway around the globe are spewing still more.

And the rush to feed this new Asian market has helped double the price of coal over the past five years, leading to a renaissance of mining and exploration in many parts of the world.

"This is a worst-case scenario," said David Graham-Caso, spokesman for the Sierra Club, which estimates that its "Beyond Coal" campaign has helped to block 139 proposed coal plants in the US over the last few years. "We don't want this coal burned here, but we don't want it burned at all. This is undermining everything we've accomplished."

Business

Nothing's Sure But Death and Debt Collection

By Ylan Mui
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON - The US Federal Trade Commission is seeking to revise the protocol surrounding two of life's touchiest subjects: debt and death.

Debt collection has become an increasingly controversial practice as more Americans default on loan payments. Government data show the charge-off rate on consumer loans spiked to 6.71 percent during the second quarter—the highest level in at least 25 years. Meanwhile, debt collection ranked second on the FTC's list of most common consumer complaints last year after not even cracking the top 20 two years ago.

The rise in debt collection has spawned a market devoted to recouping money from those who die with bills. The FTC began investigating the practice several months ago and found confusion among collectors over whom they were allowed to contact and what they could say, said Joel Winston, the agency's associate director of financial practices.

"The debt doesn't disappear when the person dies," he said. "It's still a valid debt, and the collector can still collect it."

But the question is: From whom?

The federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act limits the people that collectors can contact to those with authority to pay the debt—typically a spouse or family member, and possibly a third-party executor of an estate. But in a proposed policy statement, the FTC said changes to court procedures have widened the pool of those who may be able to pay to include a host of other legal representatives.

Some consumer activists have criticized the FTC proposal as giving too much leeway to debt collectors. In addition, they have questioned details such as use of the word "spouse" vs "widow" or "widower," arguing that marriages end upon death. Just whom debt collectors can contact is a particularly sensitive issue because the calls often come during what can be a time of high stress for friends and family of the deceased.

Locating those who can pay the debt creates another challenge. Often, collectors may contact several friends or relatives in their attempt to find the right person. Current law allows collectors to only ask for "location information" without revealing that a debt is owed. The FTC is considering relaxing that rule for those who are deceased.

A News Corp Newspaper, but Not in Print

They say an iPad makes everything sexier. Maybe even a newspaper?

By David Carr
THE NEW YORK TIMES

News Analysis

NEW YORK - Rupert Murdoch, an old-timey newspaper romantic, has nonetheless deputized himself as the digital savior of paid content. Murdoch is currently leading the charge to build The Daily, an iPad-centered newspaper under construction in the News Corp's Manhattan offices that is scheduled to appear at the beginning of next year.

With an investment of $30 million and a staff of about 100, The Daily will be the first of a kind—a "newspaper" with rich media and photography built especially for the iPad.

The enterprise has made some surprising hires from the ranks of the mainstream—Sasha Frere-Jones, the music critic of The New Yorker; Steve Alperin, a high-profile television producer; and Richard Johnson, the former king of Page Six. The Daily will incorporate some material from the rest of the News Corp—Fox Sports will provide some video, according to people putting together the prototype—but the plan is that a vast majority of the content will be original.

Murdoch told Fox Business this week that The Daily was his "number one most exciting project," a sentiment that was echoed an ocean away by his son James who called tablet newspapers "our flagship project."

Leaving aside some elephant-size editorial questions—how do you put out an original national newspaper every day with a staff of only 100?—there's an argument to be made for the News Corp's app-centric approach. Newspapers have been so busy trying to come to grips with the Web, but there may be a better opportunity on tablets and other mobile devices on which consumers are used to paying for at least some content.

The News Corp clearly sees the iPad as a way to bring consumer revenue back to the publication of news, in part because the company has had some success in building a relationship with Apple. Consumers who download The Wall Street Journal's iPad application buy their subscription from Dow Jones. Other publishers have complained that they have been locked out of selling such "in-app subscriptions" and left to sell single issues.

The night-and-day bifurcation is understandable given that Murdoch has never entirely trusted the Web, with its terrible advertising economics and brutal fight for revenue from consumers.

In July, The Times of London and The Sunday Times—both owned by the News Corp—went behind a pay wall, and the company recently reported about 100,000 payments in the first four months of the effort, only half of which were for more than one-off purchases of a story.

Subtract out subscribers to the print product, as well as Kindle and iPad users and the number of actual opt-in customers could be in the low tens of thousands. That compares with a pre-paywall audience of 6 million unique visitors, according to estimates from the research firm comScore.

Murdoch's view that Steve Jobs' device is some kind of magical kingdom for news is up against some hard realities. As innovative as it seems, The Daily will be a newspaper, an ancient motif on a modern device. It will be produced into the evening, and then a button will be pushed and it will be "printed" for the next morning. There will be updates—the number of which is still under discussion—but not at the velocity or with the urgency of a news website.

And at a time when the ecosystem of news is driven by links, The Daily will have no inbound links from other sites, and nothing outbound either. (Initially, there will be a mirror site on the Web to market some of its wares outside the high-walled kingdom of apps.)

In the short run at least, The Daily will be like a number of Murdoch's other newspapers in this respect: It will be depending on money earned by other parts of the News Corp.

In Australia, Fiber Debate Begins to Heat Up

By Rachel Pannett
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

CANBERRA, Australia - Tension rose yesterday over the privatization of Australia's planned $42.39 billion national high-speed Internet network, as a Senate debate on a competition bill began.

Australia's center-left Labor government said it remains "firmly committed" to privatizing the controversial fiber broadband network once it is completed.

The statement followed news from the influential Greens Party yesterday that it had brokered a deal with the government to support laws designed to curb dominant provider Telstra Corp's ability to compete with the national network. The Greens support came in exchange for a promise that NBN Co, the newly formed state-owned network operator, won't be privatized without parliamentary approval.

That raised questions about how the government would recoup some $26 billion in taxpayer funds expected to be used to build the ambitious network, designed to deliver high-speed communications to 93 percent of Australian homes.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy said the government will still sell its stake in NBN, subject to market conditions. But it is "mindful" of lessons learned in the privatization of Telstra. That process, overseen by the then-conservative government, created a telecommunications juggernaut against which other companies struggled to compete. Any NBN sale will be subject to parliamentary approval and an inquiry by the country's productivity watchdog, Conroy said.

The government wants to dodge the pitfalls of the Telstra privatization, "including avoiding higher prices in regional Australia," he said.

The Greens deal will remove an "automatic trigger" in new laws setting out the regulatory framework for NBN that currently requires the network to be sold five years after it is completed, according to a Greens Party spokesman.

Australia's upper house Senate began debate yesterday on a separate competition bill that underpins an $11 billion nonbinding deal reached with Telstra to help build the new state-run network, a key election pledge for Prime Minister Julia Gillard's minority government.

The competition bill passed the lower house last week with the support of independents and the sole lower house Greens member. Yesterday's deal with the Greens could aid its passage through the Senate where the government needs the support of the five Greens and two independent senators to pass any new laws.

Under a nonbinding deal reached with Telstra in June, the company has agreed to deactivate parts of its existing copper wire network as every new kilometer of the fiber-optic network is rolled out, removing its ability to use its vast existing network infrastructure to unfairly compete with the new network.

OPINION

Paradise Lost: Ireland's Woes Burst Utopians' Bubble

By Ross Douthat
THE NEW YORK TIMES

For an American tourist weaned on Gaelic kitsch and screenings of "The Quiet Man," the landscape of contemporary Ireland comes as something of a shock. Drive from Dublin to the western coast and back, as I did two months ago, and you'll still find all the thatched-roof farmhouses, winding stone walls and placid sheep that the postcards would lead you to expect. But round every green hill, there's a swath of miniature McMansions. Past every tumble-down castle, a cascade of condominiums. In sleepy fishing villages that date to the days of Grace O'Malley, Ireland's Pirate Queen (she was the Sarah Palin of the 16th century), half the houses look the part—but the rest could have been thrown up by the Toll brothers.

It's as if there were only two eras in Irish history: the Middle Ages and the housing bubble.

This actually isn't a bad way of thinking about Ireland's 20th century. The island spent decade after decade isolated, premodern and rural—and then in just a few short years, boom, modernity! The Irish sometimes say that their 1960s didn't happen until the 1990s, when secularization and the sexual revolution finally began in earnest in what had been one of the most conservative and Catholic countries in the world. But Ireland caught up fast: the kind of social and economic change that took 50 years or more in many places was compressed into a single revolutionary burst.

There was a time, not so very long ago, when everyone wanted to take credit for this transformation. Free-market conservatives hailed Ireland's rapid growth as an example of the miracles that free trade, tax cuts and deregulation can accomplish. (In 1990, Ireland ranked near the bottom of European Union nations in GDP per capita. In 2005, it ranked second.)

Progressives and secularists suggested that Ireland was thriving because it had finally escaped the Catholic Church's repressive grip, which kept horizons narrow and families large, and limited female economic opportunity. (An academic paper on this theme, "Contraception and the Celtic Tiger," earned the Malcolm Gladwell treatment in the pages of The New Yorker.) The European elite regarded Ireland as a case study in the benefits of EU integration, since the more tightly the Irish bound themselves to Continental institutions, the faster their gross domestic product rose.

Nobody tells those kinds of stories anymore. The Celtic housing bubble was more inflated than the US' (a lot of those McMansions are half-finished and abandoned), the Celtic banking industry was more reckless in its bets, and Ireland's debts, private and public, make our budget woes look manageable by comparison. The Irish economy is on everybody's mind again these days, but that's because the government has just been forced to apply for a bailout from the EU, lest Ireland become the green thread that unravels the European quilt.

If the bailout does its work and the Irish situation stabilizes, the world's attention will move on to the next EU country on the brink, whether it's Portugal, Spain or Greece (again). But when the story of the Great Recession is remembered, Ireland will offer the most potent cautionary tale. Nowhere did the imaginations of utopians run so rampant, and nowhere did they receive a more stinging rebuke.

To the utopians of capitalism, the Irish experience should be a reminder that the biggest booms can produce the biggest busts, and that debt and ruin always shadow prosperity and growth. To the utopians of secularism, the Irish experience should be a reminder that the waning of a powerful religious tradition can breed decadence as well as liberation. ("Ireland found riches a good substitute for its traditional culture," Christopher Caldwell noted, but now "we may be about to discover what happens when a traditionally poor country returns to poverty without its culture.")

But it's the utopians of European integration who should learn the hardest lessons from the Irish story. The continent-wide ripples from Ireland's banking crisis have vindicated the Euroskeptics who argued that the EU was expanded too hastily, and that a single currency couldn't accommodate such a wide diversity of nations. And the Irish government's hat-in-hand pilgrimages to Brussels have vindicated every nationalist who feared that economic union would eventually mean political subjugation. The yoke of the EU is lighter than the yoke of the British Empire, but Ireland has returned to a kind of vassal status all the same.

As for the Irish themselves, their idyllic initiation into global capitalism is over, and now they probably understand the nature of modernity a little better. At times, it can seem to deliver everything you ever wanted, and wealth beyond your dreams. But you always have to pay for it.

Leaving Politics Out of It, It's Braver to Quit Afghanistan Now

By Peter Preston
THE GUARDIAN

Let's do what any smart politician does, and reach for the latest polling results. About 92 percent of young Afghan men in Kandahar and Helmand provinces know nothing about 9/11. Mention the Twin Towers and all you get is blank looks. And 43 percent can't find anything good to say about democracy, either.

Forty percent think NATO forces are there "to destroy Islam" (or Afghanistan itself); 61 percent believe that Afghan national security forces won't be able to cope without international support; 56 percent suspect that Afghan policemen are helping the Taliban, and 25 percent reckon they'll join them in the end. The equivalent figures for national army soldiers are 39 percent helping the enemy and 30 percent switching sides when that's possible.

Now, the news since the last bout of similar polling a few months ago isn't all bleak. Rather greater numbers are backing NATO to win in the end. But that was before the great and good of the alliance met in Lisbon this weekend and decided, after a fashion, to designate Dec 31, 2014, as "the end" in question. It's a firm "deadline," according to UK Prime Minister David Cameron—or a "provisional" and "aspirational" one, according NATO's secretary-general, who seems curiously concerned that "conditions have to be right" to let the boys come home.

Of course, people talking to pollsters only express opinions rather than facts. Of course, circumstances can change. Of course, Cameron and, indeed, US President Barack Obama—both of whom need Afghanistan's long, bitter war over before they face their electorates again—may be right to set a timetable. But can we pause for a moment, draw a deep breath—and not laugh out loud?

Presumably, the Taliban have been consulted, diaries in hand, and circled various windows of opportunity for surrender. Presumably Osama bin Laden has rubber-stamped the agreement. And perhaps Taliban leader Mullah Omar's nod to join Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai in coalition—with Omar as deputy president and a deal on tuition fees for ex-insurgent students—hasn't received quite the publicity it merits.

But let's not be too blinkered as we look at the panoply of Cameron deadlines. Growth surging by New Year's Day 2015? The Irish economy turning tiger again? Labour down to 15 percent in more conventional polls?

If you set the right schedule, excluding factors you can't control, then naturally such achievements are "very doable" (as the head of Britain's armed forces says of the Premier's pledges). Anything can be realistic if you leave realism out of the equation.

Politics always dictates its own version of realism, to be sure. Obama needs withdrawal targets to keep General David Petraeus on some kind of leash. Cameron, remembering how the top brass bullied former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, probably wants to keep British defense chief Sir David Richards busy doing the do-able. Getting out of Helmand and quitting Kabul equals votes at home. Democracy may not enthuse 43 percent of Afghans, but it rules the roost back in Whitehall and Washington.

Yet things don't look like that in the killing fields. Out there, to the Taliban, Lisbon timetables have no meaning (except to nominate a time of opportunity). Out there, any notional dates on year planners may be dust and delusion one blast later. You can't be categoric in conditions like these. And if you're forced to be "firm," then there's really only one conclusion: that the men who die between now and 2015 may well die for nothing. That, if you want to get out, then do what is always do-able if you're brave enough: Just get out now.

OPINION

Time for a New Approach to US-N Korea Engagement

By Robert Carlin and John Lewis
THE WASHINGTON POST

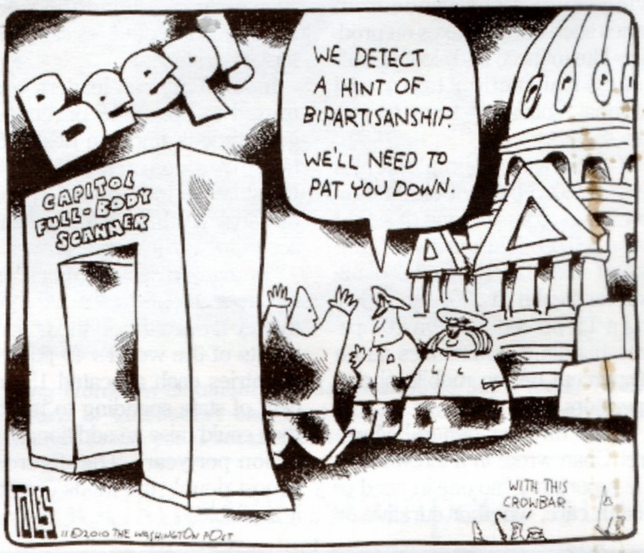
While the US has stood aside, hoping time and circumstances would force North Korea to accede to demands for denuclearization, the North has forged ahead with its own plans. Near-universal skepticism greeted Pyongyang's announcement last year that it intended to build a light-water reactor and perfect enrichment technology to fuel it. Not two weeks ago, while visiting the nuclear center at Yongbyon during a four-day trip to North Korea, we saw that the North had begun construction of a light-water reactor that could generate 25 to 30 megawatts of electric power.

Even more important, we were taken to see a small, industrial-scale centrifuge-based uranium enrichment plant. The facility—which has more than 2,000 centrifuges—appeared well-built. It looked to contain modern equipment. The North Koreans were short on details, but told us that the centrifuges were not P1 models. They said that the site was recently finished and that it was operating (a fact we could not verify from where we stood). It was meant to produce low-enriched uranium to fuel the reactor they have yet to complete, they said. Efforts to obtain light-water reactors from abroad for much-needed electricity had failed, they emphasized, so they had no choice but to make their own.

News of the North's program will spark critics to warn that negotiations have proved worthless, and that only increased international pressure can produce results. But those very arguments helped put us in this policy dilemma. Debates over whether US policy or North Korean actions are to blame can wait. What is needed, right away, is a thorough review of the past 16 years of engagement with Pyongyang, analysis of the facts as we best know them and an honest assessment of the options.

The problem of the North's nuclear program grows more difficult to resolve with the passage of time. Washington hoped that "strategic patience" and pressure from UN-mandated sanctions would force Kim Jong Il's regime to submit to demands for immediate denuclearization. Skeptics warned that this approach depended on China's willingness to squeeze North Korea and, indeed, instead of pushing Pyongyang over the past year China has strengthened its relations with the North. Their ties are better now than at any time in recent memory.

While it is unlikely that either side has dropped deep-seated suspicions of the other, there is abundant evidence that Beijing and Pyongyang see their interests as so overlapping that they will go to considerable lengths to deepen political, economic, military and security relations. Kim Jong Il traveled to China twice this year; last month he introduced his anointed successor, his youngest son, to visiting Chinese leaders. For its part, Beijing is deeply concerned about stability during the North's political succession and has signaled willingness to support the Kims' rule on a long-term basis. Any hope in Washington for a collapse of that rule is a weak reed on which to rest policy for a region vital to US interests.



We must focus on what will best protect US security and that of our allies. It does no good to say we must follow Japan and South Korea. Strong alliances should not preclude a creative US approach to Pyongyang but, rather, should be used to support one.

Dealing with North Korea is not easy, and the process has been exacerbated by myths about the travails of negotiating with its regime. This is not a problem of a particular administration or party. North Korea is on the sad list of countries that, over the years, Americans have convinced themselves they cannot understand and believe, in a self-fulfilling prophecy, that it is impossible to engage. Not so long ago, of course, China and North Vietnam were high on that list.

Amid endless policy debates over whether North Korea would change or its regime would collapse, it has survived more than 20 years since the fall of the Soviet Union. It shows every sign of staying around. Those who have been to the North know that it is nowhere near as simple to categorize as media stereotypes suggest. But not many Americans have been there, and US policies help ensure that relatively few North Koreans come here. Unfortunately, Americans are probably more isolated from North Korea than the North Koreans are from the rest of the world.

Being realistic about the North makes no moral judgment about its system or policies, nor does it cede anything in terms of our values or goals. US policymakers need to go back to square one. A realistic place to start fresh may be quite simple: accepting the existence of North Korea as it is, a sovereign state with its own interests.

Robert Carlin is a visiting fellow at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation. John Lewis is professor emeritus of Chinese politics at Stanford.

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HEALTH

One Billion People Cannot Afford Any Health Care, Says WHO

REUTERS

LONDON - About a billion people cannot afford any health services, and paying for health care pushes about 100 million people a year into poverty, the World Health Organization said yesterday.

In a global report on financing health systems, the United Nations health body said all countries, rich and poor, could do more toward getting universal coverage and urged them to think about ways to increase efficiency and use new taxes and innovative fund-raising measures to boost access to health care.

"For many, health services just don't exist, for others, they are not affordable. When they're not affordable, it means you either choose not to use them or you suffer severe financial hardship," David Evans, the WHO's director of health systems financing, said.

The World Health Report 2010 lays out the steps that countries could take to raise more funds, and reduce financial barriers to obtaining health care, and to make health care services more efficient.

It found that to stop health care payments from impoverishing people, direct, out-of-pocket payments should make up less than 15 to 20 percent of a country's total health spending.

Yet currently, in 33 mainly low- and middle-income countries, direct payments from individuals receiving health care still account for more than 50 percent of total health spending.

The report suggested that governments should look at diversifying sources of revenue from levies such as "sin" taxes on products like tobacco and alcohol, currency transaction taxes and national "solidarity" taxes on certain sectors.

If India were to implement a levy of 0.005 percent on foreign-exchange transactions, it could raise $370 million per year, the report said. Gabon raised $30 million for health in 2009 by imposing a 1.5 percent levy on companies handling remittances and a 10 percent tax on mobile phone operators.

WHO director general Margaret Chan wrote in a foreword to the report that "no one in need of health care, whether curative or preventive, should risk financial ruin as a result."

"As the world grapples with economic slowdown, globalization of diseases...and growing demands for chronic care...the need for universal health coverage, and a strategy for financing it, has never been greater," the report said.

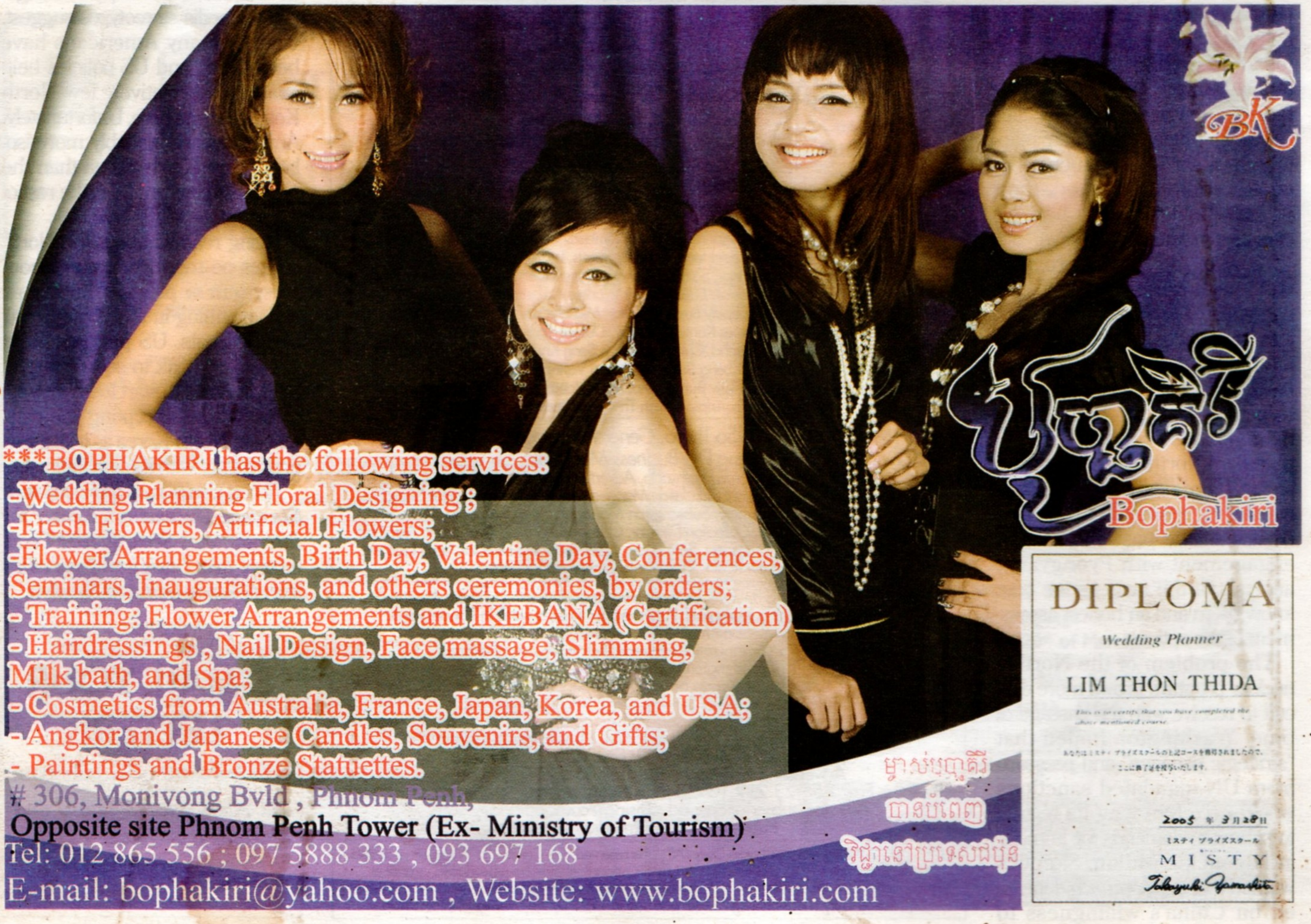
"There is no magic bullet to achieving universal access. Nevertheless, a wide range of experiences from around the world suggests that countries can move forward faster."

In 2000, African leaders committed to spend 15 percent of government funds on health. So far, three countries (Liberia, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania) have achieved this, according to the report.

"In many cases, there is scope for governments to allocate more money for health.... If the governments of the world's 49 poorest countries each allocated 15 precent of state spending to health, they could raise an additional $15 billion per year." That figure is almost double the funds currently available.

The WHO said that typically, 20 to 40 percent of health spending is wasted, often through spending on expensive but unnecessary drugs, hospital-related inefficiency and poor use of skilled professionals' time.

More than half of all medicines globally are prescribed, dispensed or sold inappropriately, and half of all patients fail to take their medication as prescribed. Better use of medicines could save nations up to 5 percent of health spending, it said.

To improve efficiency, the report suggested 10 areas where changes could be made, including reducing unnecessary spending on drugs, targeting medicines properly and adopting a generics policy whereby any branded medicine for which there is an equally effective generic version is substituted.

The report found some countries pay far more for medicines than others—in some places prices are up to 67 times the international average. France's strategy of generic substitution led to savings equivalent to $1.94 billion in 2008, it said.